

THE ARMED SHIP AMERICA

THE PRIVATEERS OF 1812



SERIES

JAMES OTIS

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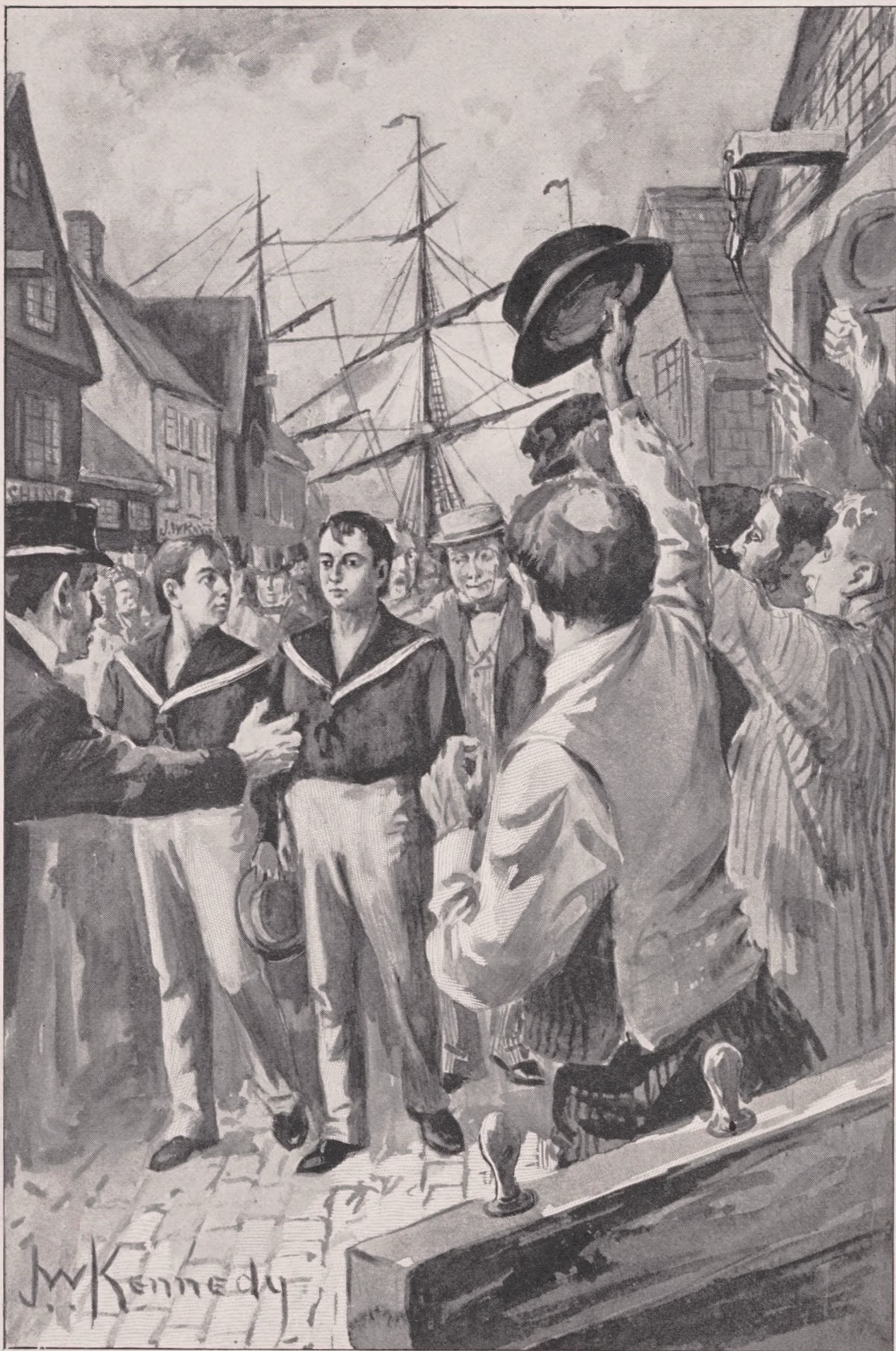
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

THE ARMED SHIP AMERICA

OR

WHEN WE SAILED FROM SALEM



"IT WAS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT WE COULD MAKE OUR WAY TO
THE HEAD OF THE DOCK."

THE
ARMED SHIP AMERICA
OR
WHEN WE SAILED FROM SALEM

BY
JAMES OTIS

AUTHOR OF
"THE CRUISE OF THE COMET," "THE BOYS OF
FORT SCHUYLER," "JENNY WREN'S
BOARDING-HOUSE," ETC.

Illustrated by
J. W. KENNEDY



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DANA ESTES & COMPANY
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“IN the United States every possible encouragement should be given to privateering in time of war with a commercial nation. We have tens of thousands of seamen that without it would be destitute of the means of support, and useless to their country. Our national ships are too few in number to give employment to one-twentieth part of them, or retaliate the acts of the enemy. By licensing private-armed vessels, the whole naval force of the nation is truly brought to bear on the foe ; and while the contest lasts, that it may have the speedier termination, let every individual contribute his mite, in the best way he can, to distress and harass the enemy, and compel him to peace.”

— *From a letter written by Thomas Jefferson, July 4, 1812.*

NOTE.

A PACKAGE of manuscript, the pages of which had evidently been cut from an old ledger or journal, each leaf yellowed by time and worn as if with much use, lately came into the possession of him who, rightfully or wrongfully, claims to be the author of the yarn spun between these covers. Both sides of the paper were covered with writing in a boyish hand, and much of the subject matter related to private affairs such as could be of no especial interest to the general reader. All that had reference to the cruise of the private-armed ship *America*, and the doings of the writer, Nathan Crowninshield, and his comrade, Simon Ropes, has been preserved herein. It is set down very nearly as it was written eighty years ago, by the lad from Salem, who, at the time of preparing the manuscript, was living on Staten Island in New York Bay. That it is a true and faithful account of the eventful cruise, we know full well, since the more important happenings have been verified by documents to be found in the custom-houses at Salem, Boston, and Portland, Maine.

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THE ARMED SHIP AMERICA;

OR,

WHEN WE SAILED FROM SALEM.

CHAPTER I.

AN OPPORTUNITY.

IT is not my intention to claim that Simon Ropes, son of that famous mariner, Captain Joseph Ropes, or myself, Nathan Crowninshield, nephew and cousin of the well-known Salem firm of ship-owners, the Messrs. George Crowninshield and Sons, bore any important part in the war between the United States and Great Britain which was begun in the year 1812; but that we two lads did all which might be expected from youngsters of our age is a fact that can be proven by more than one sailing-master or seaman hailing from the Massachusetts coast:

It is near to eight years since Simon Ropes and I signed articles for a cruise on board the private-armed ship *America*.

Then Simon, who was the elder, had just turned fifteen years, and I was three months his junior.

Why we were allowed to ship on board such a famous craft as the *America*, should be set down first in this tale, which I am writing simply in order that, after we have grown to be old men, it may be possible for us to recall more minutely the events in which we bore some little share than if we trusted solely to memory.

If, perchance, this poor attempt at what a clerkly mind might fashion into a most entertaining story should at any time come into the possession of others, it is well that I repeat why it has been written, lest strangers think I did it simply for the self-glorification of Simon and myself, instead of which the tale has been preserved, if it so chance it be preserved any length of time, for the purpose of making public the doings of all on board that armed ship hailing from Salem, which wrought so much injury to British shipping.

The *America* was built in Salem, in 1804, and should have been given some other name because of the fact that many have since believed her to be the same craft which made a cruise in 1802, when the United States was at war with France.

Our ship was Salem built, of three hundred and fifty tons burthen, carrying twenty guns, and with a complement of from one hundred and fifty to one hundred and seventy-five men.

She was then, and I believe of a verity is now, the fastest ship afloat, being credited with having brought into port, during this last war, one million, one hundred thousand dollars' worth of property; with having de-

stroyed nearly as much more, and netting her owners, between September of 1812 and April, 1815, six hundred thousand dollars.

She is owned by the Messrs. George Crowninshield and Sons, the senior member of which firm is my uncle, a whole-souled, generous man, as all who know him can testify, and none better than myself; for from the time my father, Captain Benjamin Crowninshield, died, which was in 1810, Uncle George cared for the widow and son of his brother more tenderly than the majority of men care for their own.

It was in August of the year 1812 when the *America* was overhauled and made ready for a privateering cruise. Previous to that time she had been in the merchant service, and earned for herself much credit, it being stated by those who sailed her that there was nothing afloat to which she could not show her heels.

When the people of the United States had finally discovered that patience ceased to be a virtue, that the time was arrived when we as a nation should protect our own seamen against Great Britain's press-gangs, my uncle and cousins decided that the good ship *America* should take part in the struggle, by teaching the Britishers a much needed lesson at the same time that she brought in many dollars to her owners.

Captain Joseph Ropes, Simon's father, was allowed to be the most skilful navigator and the ablest sailing-master in the United States.

In view of what has been done since then by privateers-

men from Portland and Baltimore, it would seem as if that which has just been set down is a rash statement, and yet must I hold to it, for when the war broke out Captain Joseph could have commanded any vessel, outside the navy, which struck his fancy.

We of Salem believed, and this belief was afterward proven to be correct, that the *America* was by long odds the finest craft of her kind afloat, and therefore the people along the Massachusetts coast took it for granted that she would be commanded by Captain Ropes.

The ship was well worthy such a master, and certain it was she would never come to grief through any carelessness or misjudgment of his.

Therefore, when it was announced that Captain Ropes would sail the *America*, no one in or around Salem expressed surprise, or even intimated that a better choice could have been made.

While the ship was being fitted for sea, Simon and I, as may be supposed, were constantly on board of her, watching the men as they put in place the twenty formidable-looking guns, and listening to the yarns told by old Joshua Seabury, who had, during the war with Tripoli, proven himself as good a gunner as he was seaman, than which no greater praise could be bestowed.

"Master Josh," we lads designated him, and very careful were we to tack on the "Master" since the day he flogged Daniel Kelley with a rope's end, for daring to call him "Josh."

A good friend to Simon and me was the gunner, and,

before he had been given the charge of superintending the arming of the *America*, he spent much time with us two lads, spinning yarns of his adventures with the Tripolitan pirates.

There was not another lad in Salem allowed to come over the rail of the *America* while Master Josh was aboard, and even though one of us was the nephew of the owner, and the other the son of the captain, we two would have been denied the privilege but for the fact of our friendliness with the old gunner.

We little dreamed, during the early days of the war, that through the old man's friendship we would become members of the famous ship's crew, for where there were so many eager to sign articles it did not seem likely Captain Ropes would lumber his craft with green lads.

From the first hour the work of arming the ship was begun, Simon and I watched keenly every portion of the work, and I question if a single block was put in place, if the smallest rope or hawser was stretched, without our knowledge. When Master Josh desired to send word ashore, either Simon or I was selected as the messenger. In case any trifling task within our power was to be performed, the old sailor called upon us for assistance, as if we were in duty bound to render it, and right proud were we of such distinction, for it was a distinction to be ordered here or there by a man who had fought the Tripolitan pirates, — a man who had borne his share in the destruction of the *Philadelphia* when she lay beneath the guns of Tripoli.

Well, this condition of affairs, so far as we two lads were concerned, went on throughout the month of August, and until the ship was so far in readiness for the cruise that the water and provisions were being put on board. Then Simon and I were literally astounded by a proposition which the old gunner made as if it was the natural outcome of events.

We two lads were lounging around the gun-deck after the day's work had come to a close. Master Josh was seated on a small-arms-chest smoking his pipe and enjoying a well-earned rest before turning in.

Simon, believing we had earned the right to hear a yarn from the old gunner, began leading up to the subject by asking questions concerning the destruction of the *Philadelphia*, knowing full well that once we could get Master Josh warmed up to the affair, he would hold to it so long as we might be able to listen.

On this night the scheme was not a success, much to our disappointment. He answered Simon's questions curtly, while his mind seemed to be far away from that which he ordinarily was only too willing to hold forth on, and I was beginning to feel as if we had been in a certain measure defrauded of our rights, when Master Josh said suddenly, startling me almost out of my wits by the boldness of the idea:

"Are you two lads countin' on shippin' aboard this 'ere craft?"

"Do you mean Nathan and me?" Simon asked, in astonishment.

“Ay, lad, and why not ‘Nathan and me’?”

“Why not?” Simon repeated. “Do you allow that my father would take on two boys, when able seamen are tumbling over each other in their eagerness to ship aboard the *America*?”

“Well, what of that?” and the old man puffed vigorously at his pipe.

“I reckon we would stand little chance against those who are begging Captain Ropes for permission to ship aboard this craft,” I said, and for the hundredth time there came into my heart the thought that, if we might be allowed to join the crew, it was possible we could show ourselves worthy the great honour; but yet I realised how hopeless was such an ambition.

“How old was your father when he first went to sea?” Master Josh asked of Simon.

“Nearly three years younger than I am now.”

“An’ I allow some captain gave him a chance, else he never’d earned the name he’s made.”

“That goes without saying,” Simon replied, as if in bewilderment, for he failed to understand what the old man was driving at.

“Then it stands to reason he should do as good a service for his own son; an’ if George Crowninshield can’t serve his nephew a friendly turn at a time when everything is to be gained, things have come to a pretty pass.”

Simon and I stared at the old man in silence, for it seemed much as if he had taken leave of his senses.

From the moment it was known that the *America* would be armed as a privateer, the ablest seamen from far and near were coming into Salem with the hope of being allowed to ship on board her, and one could not walk the length of the town without hearing on this corner or on that speculations as to who would be the lucky men when the articles were ready for the signing.

The old gunner smoked on, as if the subject had come to an end so far as he was concerned, and, the hope which had been so often in my heart growing stronger, I ventured to ask, but with a certain hesitation as if I were simply proving my folly :

“Do you suppose, Master Josh, that it would be of any use for Simon and me to beg of Captain Ropes or Uncle George that we be allowed to go on this cruise?”

“Do you suppose, Nathan Crowninshield, that Captain Ropes or Uncle George would get down on their knees an’ beg you two to come on this ’ere cruise, if it so be you never let on that you was achin’ for the chance?” Master Josh asked, mockingly.

I caught at the words eagerly, believing, as I afterward came to know was the truth, that in them lay a suggestion to us.

The old man had no mind to openly advise us lads to apply for a berth aboard the *America*, but would have been well pleased for us to do so.

Instead of continuing the conversation, Master Josh smothered the fire in the bowl of his pipe with his thumb, and, without giving further heed to us, walked forward,

leaving Simon and me staring at each other as we tried to put into shape the thoughts aroused by his words, which were forming themselves in our minds.

How long we sat there gazing at each other like a couple of stupid I know not, but after a certain time it flashed across me that we were showing ourselves dull indeed by not following the advice contained in the old man's words, and moving closely to Simon, as if fearing some one might overhear and make sport of us for having such high and mighty notions, I whispered :

"Surely it can do no harm if we apply for berths on board this ship ? "

"Are you so puffed up as to believe that we might be allowed to sign articles ? " Simon asked, in a scornful tone, and, now grown bold because of increased hope, I said, as if having weighed well the matter, although of a verity it had come only with Master Josh's speech :

"There's an old saying, that if nothing be ventured nothing can be gained, and surely we shall be in no serious condition if your father and my uncle refuse permission for us to become members of the crew."

"We are like to gain their laughter and scorn ; but nothing more," Simon replied.

"Well, and surely that is not so serious a matter. In these times two men will hardly give many hours to making sport of a couple of lads, and, as Master Josh has said, they will never ask us to join the crew unless we show a desire."

"I am not of the mind to make such a simple of my-

self," Simon replied, doggedly ; whereat, nettled by his words, I said, bravely :

"If you but come with me I will do the talking, and afterward, if it so be your pleasure, you may deny that there was in your mind any idea we might be taken on."

He looked at me for a moment as if questioning whether I was in my right mind, and then said, in the tone of one who would drive a sharp bargain :

"If you make the request known this night, Nathan Crowninshield, I will stand by your side while the words are spoken, and take upon myself such blame as may follow ; but it must be done before we go to bed, for I'll not try to sleep while there's any prospect of such a possibility."

"By those words you are admitting there is a chance that we be allowed to ship."

"Perhaps so."

"Then come with me, and we'll have the matter settled at once. I am ready to do even more than make a simple request, on the possibility that we might leave port on board this ship."

"My father was to be in your uncle's counting-room to-night, so I heard him tell mother, and if your courage holds good, we two may be laughed at by all the clerks in the Crowninshields' office before an hour has passed."

Simon could have pursued no wiser course, had he wished to urge me on to such a step ; for by his tone I understood him to intimate that I was afraid to make the attempt, and without further parley I cried :

“Follow me, unless it so be you are afraid! I count on asking permission from the captain and owner of this ship to sail in her, when she goes forth to work destruction upon British craft.”

Then, perhaps, fearing lest the courage should ooze out at my fingers' ends, I went rapidly on deck, over the rail, and headed straight for the office of the owners.

Under almost any other circumstances I would not have dared to enter that portion of the counting-room where my Uncle George transacted the more private business of the concern; but at this time I was made bold by desperation, knowing full well that a delay of five minutes or more might serve to shake the resolution I had formed.

My Uncle George and Captain Ropes were holding what I could well fancy was a private consultation on matters concerning the ship, and both looked up in surprise, not unmixed with anger, when we two lads stood before them.

I knew from the expression on my uncle's face that it was in his mind to say something harsh concerning our intrusion; and, feeling as if I had destroyed what little chance we might have had by such a display of rudeness, I blurted out the request which was formed in my mind, before either of the gentlemen had time to speak.

“We have come to ask that we be allowed to ship on board the *America*, and do so because of certain words just let fall by Master Josh,” I said, using every effort to speak distinctly, and at the same time rapidly. “My

excuse for thus venturing here unbidden is that I dared not wait longer lest I lack the courage to make the request."

"What has Joshua Seabury been saying to you?" my uncle asked, sharply. "Why should he above all others think that two boys may be allowed to call themselves members of an armed ship's crew?"

Being thus called upon to defend myself, as it were, I repeated in substance the few words the old man had spoken, laying considerable stress upon the fact that Captain Ropes was three years younger than Simon and me when he first went to sea, and urging that, if Master Josh would take us under his tuition, we should beyond a question pay our footing, even though we might not earn the smallest wages.

Because of the fear—I might almost say the belief, that our request would be treated with disdain, and thinking another opportunity to make our wishes known might not present itself, I succeeded in stating our case fairly well, as I believed.

Before having concluded with all the arguments which presented themselves to my mind, I saw Captain Ropes look at his son in a friendly fashion, and then glance inquiringly at my uncle, whereat the latter, observing the mute question, answered:

"Two lads like those would simply be so much useless lumber aboard the ship, eh, captain?"

My heart sank at what I believed was the beginning of a refusal; but rose very suddenly when Simon's father

replied, with an air which told that he considered our request in a certain degree important :

“ Unless we count on setting some of the men to do boy’s duty, we are like to need a few lads, Master Crowninshield.”

“ Ay ; but you want such as have had some experience.”

“ If old Joshua Seabury cares to take these two lads under his wing, I’ll answer for it they will be experienced before we get well settled down to our work,” the captain replied, grimly, and Simon furtively kicked me, as if to say that fortune was smiling upon us.

“ I question much if your mother would give her permission for you to join the *America’s* crew, Nathan,” my uncle said, after a brief pause.

“ She is willing, sir, that I become a sailor, as was my father before me, and surely could not refuse her permission if I should have such opportunity of serving an apprenticeship as would come under the command of a sailor like Captain Ropes.”

“ You have turned that nicely, my lad,” Simon’s father said, with a chuckle, “ and if it so be Master Crowninshield is willing to trust you aboard the *America*, my boy shall go, too ; but I give you both fair warning that you will be treated the same as any lads whom I had never seen.”

“ We ask for nothing more than that, sir,” Simon said, quickly, and I understood, although the formal permission had not really been given, that we two boys were favoured far above many able seamen of Salem, inasmuch as we

would leave port on board the staunchest and swiftest privateer afloat.

Well, not to make too many words of what is in fact a short story, it is enough for me to say that, when Simon Ropes and I went to bed that night, it was with the knowledge that on the following morning we might present ourselves to the old gunner as lads belonging to the *America*, under his charge.

It is true my mother wept some while I gleefully told her of the good fortune which was mine; but never a word did she speak against the project, for again and again had we talked of the day when I should set off to follow in my father's footsteps.

She must have realised that in a lifetime I might never hope to have such an opportunity of becoming a sailor as now presented itself, and while I doubt not that her heart trembled as she thought of our engaging in a regular battle, no remonstrance was made against it.

Simon Ropes and I did not give words to the exultation both felt, when we parted for the night.

Already had we begun to realise the responsibilities which would be ours. Even now we understood somewhat of the sorrow that must come when we parted with our mothers, and had a vague idea that when we left Salem it might be never to return.

Therefore it was we gave token of our joy only by a silent clasp of the hand.

I am not ashamed to set it down that my pillow was wet with tears that night, as I lay thinking of the many

days which must pass before I should see my home again, if indeed I ever did, and I dwelt much longer on my mother's grief and my own loneliness, when we should be parted, than on the glory which might be mine in case I lived to be clasped in her loving arms again.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER WAY.

ALTHOUGH there was no possibility the *America* could leave port within ten days, under the most favourable circumstances, Simon Ropes and I presented ourselves on board next morning before the sun had risen, as if fearing the privateer might get under way while we were making ready.

Having counted on surprising Master Josh by announcing that we were to sign articles as members of the crew whenever the papers were made ready, we were disappointed.

I believe the old man had been firmly convinced that Simon's father and my uncle would allow us to ship, once the desire was made known, for he treated our coming as a matter of course, and, to our great surprise, ceased from that moment to be the friendly friend we had ever known him.

Instead of asking if we would kindly do this or that, or explaining that it would be to our advantage if we learned to make such a splice or tie a particular knot, he drove us to work like slaves, and one would have fancied that we met him for the first time on that morning.

Having partaken of a scanty breakfast, owing to our eagerness to be on board the ship at an early hour, it was by no means pleasant to run here or there at the old gunner's call, or, when one was doing his best, to be sharply reprimanded because he had not succeeded in accomplishing more.

In fact, the change in his manner was so decided and disagreeable that I came to believe something had gone wrong over night, and took counsel with Simon concerning it.

The result of our conference was that we made up our minds to demand an explanation from Master Josh, and without delay.

We were ready to obey him while he spoke us in friendly fashion, but when it came to being ordered about as if we were hardly better than the dirt beneath his feet, we were disposed to raise forcible and emphatic objections.

Simon insisted that I should be the one to demand an explanation, promising to stand close behind me meanwhile, thus showing that he was in full accord with all I said, and without delay we sought out the old man.

At the time he chanced to be working upon Number One gun, on the starboard side, and although it is certain he saw us approaching, never so much as a sign of consciousness did he give.

This seeming indifference nettled me quite as much as had his suddenly assumed tone of command, and I broke out hotly, asking why it was that he took unto himself so many high and mighty airs without due cause, so far as we could understand.

The old man ceased his work very suddenly when I began to speak, and, before having come to the end of the reproaches, I believed of a verity he was minded to raise his hand against me.

He evidently thought better of it, however, for when I was come to an end of words, the old gunner straightened himself up, surveying both Simon and me from head to foot, after which he asked, in what sounded very much like a jeering tone :

“Did I understand you two lads aright this morning, when it was allowed that you’d the same as shipped aboard the *America*?”

“Of course you did,” I said, quickly, not realising what turn he was giving to the situation. “There could have been no mistake when we said that permission had been given us, both, by Captain Ropes and my Uncle George.”

“Then it is allowed that you are the same as members of the crew, eh?”

“How else can it be?”

“That was the way I understood it, and now hark ye, lads. Is it in your mind that boys aboard ship are to be dandled an’ petted? Have you got the idee that every man Jack of us must take off his hat ’cause one of you happens to be son of the captain, an’ the other a nephew of the owner?”

I looked at Simon, not knowing what reply to make to such a question, and he gazed at me in mute astonishment.

“You may as well make up your minds as to what you count on bein’ aboard this ship, ’cause the matter’s got to



“THE OLD GUNNER STRAIGHTENED HIMSELF UP, SURVEYING BOTH
SIMON AND ME.”

be settled mighty soon," the old gunner said, solemnly. "I took it for granted that you was rated as boys; but if it so be you're reckonin' on makin' the cruise for pleasure, an' settin' yourselves above the others with high an' lofty airs 'cause of your relationship, why, then, we'll have a plain understandin' from the start. It ain't allowed that passengers may mosey 'round here for'ard, — leastways it never has been on any ship I was aboard of; so you'll excuse me for takin' the liberty of settin' you about a sailorman's duties, otherwise I'll call the crew of the captain's gig to escort you into the cabin, where you seem to belong."

The old man tugged at the lock of hair over his forehead, as he scraped with one foot, in what he believed to be the proper kind of a bow, and started aft as if to carry out his threat.

Now, although I had never been to sea, I knew enough of a sailorman's life to understand that if the remainder of the crew got the slightest inkling of what had just happened, our lives would be far from pleasant during the cruise; therefore, I checked him by clutching at his arm, imploringly, as I cried:

"We were in the wrong when we complained, Master Josh. Surely you have known us long enough to believe that we no more intend to shirk our duties than to play the part of passengers. It was because you had changed so completely that we came to you with the questions in our mouths."

"Accordin' to your talk, it seems that you understand

the matter without my goin' into very many explanations," the old man said, grimly.

"What you have said is the same as an explanation, sir," Simon meekly replied. "If you will please set us about some task we'll agree never to raise another question, however changed your manner may be."

"Well, I allow it's jest as well if we let it drop at that," the old gunner said, thoughtfully, "an' for the sake of your peace of mind in the future, I'd have you youngsters understand that, once we're under way, you will be expected to do such work as is given to boys, without turnin' rusty in case one of us don't happen to handle you with gloves on. Sailorin' is a serious business, but nothin' as compared with privateerin'. On a cruise like the one we're countin' to make, it's a matter of jumpin' to orders from the youngest to the oldest, an' no back talk. I had the idee that you was to be took under my wing, so to speak."

"Have you seen Simon's father or my uncle?" I asked, quickly, now beginning to understand why the old man had turned about so suddenly in his behaviour.

"It may be I had a bit of a chin with one or the other of 'em last night."

"And you were told to jump down on us the first thing, this morning, so that we might know our stations without being allowed time in which to make fools of ourselves?"

"I can't rightly say it was exactly as you put it, lad. I was given to understand that it depended on me to make sailormen out of you, if it so be there was stuff enough of

the kind inside your young skins, an' such bein' the case, from this out there will be no explanations made. When things don't go to suit you, I'm allowin' you'd best swallow 'em, or take the chances of knowin' how heavy the rope's end is when it's laid on a lad's back in proper fashion. Now then, if you've had enough of this cacklin', get to work, an' see to it you stick at the job, for there'll be no sodgerin' aboard this ship either by young or old, that you can depend on."

It can well be understood that from this moment we held our peace whether affairs were to our liking or not, and, also, that we never again presumed upon the friendliness which the old gunner had previously displayed; but buckled with a will to whatever task we were set at.

Before this day came to an end both of us realised fully that we were no more than any other two boys who might have been allowed to ship aboard the privateer, and that no favours were to be shown because of relationship either to the captain or owner.

Now, it is not my purpose to set down here anything more than may be necessary to a thorough understanding of what Simon Ropes and I did and saw while we were aboard the *America*, and because there was nothing of interest in the fitting out of the ship I count on passing over all which occurred from the day we were taught our true station among the crew of the ship, until she was gotten under way, at half-past eleven o'clock on the morning of Monday, September 7th, in the year of grace 1812.

I do not reckon on making mention of the parting with my mother.

It was far too sad a scene to be described in written words, and too sacred, according to my way of thinking, to be held up for the amusement or derision of youngsters.

It is enough if I say that when I went on board, less than an hour before the ship was gotten under way, my eyes were red and swollen with much weeping, and I met Simon Ropes, who looked as if his experience had been much the same as mine.

There was no need of words between us. Each understood what was in the other's heart, and at that moment, if it could have been done without holding ourselves up to the scorn of our acquaintances, I believe of a verity both of us would have fled from the ship, even though we had formally signed the articles, and, therefore, would be looked upon as deserters if we went on shore without permission.

For my part, I know that never before nor since has my heart been as heavy as on that September morning when I made my way through the throng of men, women, and children that lined the shore, to the boat which was in waiting to carry me on board.

My schoolmates would have gathered around me, envious of what they were pleased to term my good fortune. At another time their words would have been like sweetest music in my ears ; but on this morning it was as if they mocked me, so bowed down was I by the grief born of that first parting, and I refused to hold any converse with

them, thereby laying myself open to the charge of being "stuck up."

I said to myself that, had I realised what it might cost a lad to leave his mother, — the best friend he can ever know in this world, — not all the glory nor the money that could be gained during the most successful privateering cruise would have tempted me to bring so much of grief upon her.

However, I had shipped as a boy aboard the *America*. There was never a lad of my acquaintance in town who had not been made aware of this fact, and the shame of being called a coward prevented me from doing that which I most desired.

Simon and I were aboard the same boat, but neither spoke during the short passage from the shore to the ship.

When we came over the rail the old gunner was standing near by and my heart warmed toward him as never before, because of the words which he spoke at that sad time :

"Find something with which to keep yourselves busy, lads," he said, in a most friendly tone. "Having been through with this kind of business myself, I've got a pretty good idee of how you're feelin', an' there's nothin' better calculated to make you worse than idleness. Hard work an' plenty of it is what will do you a power of good for the next four an' twenty hours."

And hard work we got.

It was as if Master Josh racked his brains to set us task after task in rapid succession, one coming upon the heels

of the other so rapidly that we absolutely had no time for thought, and afterward I understood how wholesome was his medicine.

As I have said, the shore was lined with people waiting for the *America* to get under way, and when finally the anchor was tripped, a shout went up from the throng which thrilled our hearts, and caused me for an instant to forget that in the town was a woman weeping, — a woman who loved me dearly, as I did her.

Well, we were off at last, and the first and worst wrench caused by the breaking of home ties was over, so far as I was concerned, save that it left my heart sore and bruised.

By noon we were off Baker's Island heading due south-east, and I realised that the voyage was really begun, when the good ship rose and fell upon the ocean swell with a motion well calculated to upset the stomach of a landsman.

Simon Ropes and I considered ourselves fairly good sailormen, and yet, before night came, we were paying the same penalty, and in quite as severe a form, as the veriest landsman who ever ventured outside the harbour.

This sickness was, in a certain degree, a benefit, since it caused us to forget the loneliness which had come upon us with the parting, and not until eight and forty hours had passed did we venture to show ourselves above the gun-deck.

Once in the open air, after our long sojourn below, it was as if we had suddenly emerged upon a scene of warfare.

The ship was under easy canvas, and needed but little conning. Both watches were on deck, and the third officer, Mr. Tibbetts, was instructing the crew in the use of small arms, Captain Ropes and the remainder of his officers acting as spectators, but taking a hand, now and then, in the lessons.

I may as well say here that, from this time forth, whenever the weather permitted, and there were no important tasks to be performed, the men spent their time working the great guns, or drilling with small arms, and such practice never came to an end throughout the cruise, however expert we grew to be.

No one gave any heed to Simon and me, until Master Josh chanced to espy us, and then, although we were feeling far from well, it became necessary for us to join in the drill.

We left port at noon on Monday, and had not attempted to get out of our hammocks until Wednesday was well-nigh spent.

By the time supper was served, however, we were quite ready for the food, thanks to the labour performed, although it was dished up in anything rather than a palatable fashion, as compared with what we had been accustomed to in our homes.

I was not a weak-stomached lad; but sitting around a mess-kid, filled with greasy-looking stuff, which was given the name of hash, and taking my share with half a dozen tarry-handed sailors, who were neither careful of their person nor their language, drinking, if one drank at all,

the odd-looking stuff which was called tea, would have destroyed the appetite that had come upon me, save for the fact that I had fasted so long.

Before a week passed, however, Simon and I were equal to the emergency, and in good condition to get our full share of whatsoever was served, save when it came to the allotment of rum, of which each man had half a pint poured into his pannikin, twice a day, and at this our stomachs rebelled. We never could bring ourselves to drink it, but traded the stuff for whatsoever our messmates chose to offer in exchange.

Until Thursday night we had such weather as would delight fresh-water sailors, with, perhaps, a trifle overmuch wind, in the opinion of landsmen, and then came our first experience of a storm at sea, when the ship rose and fell, seeming now to throw herself against the great walls of water, or again rolling until it was as if she lay completely on her beam ends.

The howling of the wind, the rattle of cordage, the groaning of timbers, and the shrieking of the waters when they leaped inboard, as if eager to overwhelm us, was sufficient to terrify all save the stoutest-hearted, and yet, after a time, even before the gale was at its height, Simon and I came to take it all quite calmly. By observing those around us, we could see that there was not even the shadow of a fear in the hearts of any, because all knew full well the strength and staunchness of the ship, and to them the gale was a friendly one, since it carried them more swiftly in the desired direction.

Since Master Josh had taken us under his wing, we were assigned to the same watch with him, and although, where the crew was so large, there was absolutely nothing for boys to do, the old man never allowed us to shirk our duties in this respect.

We were forced to remain on deck, exactly as if the welfare of the ship depended upon our being there, and no exception was made during this first storm.

"You may as well take all that comes to a sailorman's lot, lads," Master Josh said, when we were ordered to the spar-deck, on the morning after the storm had burst upon us, while the ship was tumbling, plunging, and pitching at such a rate that the most experienced of the crew were forced to clutch at this thing or that, in order to make their way forward or aft. "If you get in the habit of stayin' below, just 'cause there happens to be a little breeze, your chances of ever bein' rated as able seamen will be small."

We literally clawed our way up on the spar-deck, Simon shouting in my ear, for the din was so great that only by the severest exertions could he make himself heard:

"If this is what Master Josh calls a 'breeze,' I hope we may never be afloat in one of his gales."

Our coming on deck was needless, since no one called upon us for any service, and we would have been unable to perform the slightest task even had it been required.

We took up our stations near the foremast, where we might the better hold ourselves steady, and there remained, knowing full well that we were not adding to our store of knowledge in the slightest degree.

So far as making sailormen of ourselves was concerned, we might just as well have remained in the hammocks on the gun-deck, and it would have been vastly more comfortable, for we were wet to the skin within five minutes after having come above.

Save for the fact that the men went about their duties unconcernedly, with no show of alarm, and behaving much as if this sort of weather was not only to be expected but pleasing, I should have believed the ship was in the greatest danger, and in truth it was many minutes before I could look up at the waves, which now and then towered far above us, without feeling positive that death was very near at hand.

After a time, however, we became in a certain degree accustomed to the tumult, and found it possible to watch what was going on around us with some degree of intelligence.

I noticed with mild curiosity that five men were on the maintopmast, and wondered whether it was their purpose to snug down the canvas, or if the captain had it in his mind to show more sail to the howling wind.

They were so nearly above me that I could not clearly observe their movements, and while I stood gazing at them, rather because I had nothing else with which to occupy my mind than that their movements particularly interested me, a sharper gust of wind than we had so far felt came swooping down upon us, causing the ship to lay over until her yard-arm ploughed off the tops of the white-capped billows.

The little company aloft continued at their task as if there was nothing in the situation to cause alarm, and slowly, inch by inch as it were, the gallant craft came up nearly to an even keel, only to be whirled back once more by what was like unto a cloud of wind, and then was mingled with the shrieking and howling and hissing the sound as of splintering wood.

Even as I gazed the spar was carried away, the heavy ropes snapping like whip-cords under a tremendous strain.

It was as if my heart stood still, and breath failed me when those five brave fellows, one of whom lived in Salem within a stone's throw of my mother's dwelling, were engulfed in that angry sea, upon which it seemed as if no craft smaller than our ship could possibly live.

Fortunately, others beside myself had seen the disaster, and then, although I did not realise it at just that moment, we came to understand of how much advantage was the constant drill and practice to which the men had been subjected since the hour of leaving port.

Captain Ropes chanced to be on deck at the fatal instant, and there was no more of confusion or apparent excitement when the ship was put about than if we had been executing some ordinary manœuvre in fair weather.

At the first cry betokening danger every man went to his station, and the orders which came from the quarter-deck were obeyed almost as soon as spoken, with such effect that it seemed to me as if no more than three minutes elapsed before our course was completely changed.

I came to understand, however, that much more time

had passed than I supposed, on seeing how far away was the splintered spar to which our shipmates were clinging, knowing full well that whatsoever of aid was possible in such an angry tumult of waters would be given them.

But for the fact of having been on board the *America* at this time, I could set down a most thrilling description of what might have occurred from the moment the spar was carried away until the half-drowned men were brought aboard; but having been there, I am forced to say it was all as commonplace, and the work performed as methodically, as during the simplest manœuvre which can be imagined.

In less than half an hour our five messmates were with us once more, and all hands were engaged in making ready a new spar.

The extra amount of labour required, and the short deviation from our course, appeared to Simon and me to be the only result of this accident; but when we were below once more, where we could hear the men yarning and arguing as sailors will, I came to understand that the mishap might work serious mischief in the future.

One and all of the crew insisted that we had begun the voyage with a bad omen; that this breaking of a new spar when we were hardly more than out of port, was a sign that the cruise would be a disastrous one, more particularly since it occurred on a Friday, and the foremost among the croakers was none other than Master Joshua Seabury, he whom Simon Ropes and I looked up to as the ablest, bravest seaman that ever jockeyed a yard-arm.

CHAPTER III.

OMENS.

IT was only after the gale had died away, and a new topmast had been sent aloft, that we lads came to understand how much mischief or trouble, whichever you choose to term it, might come of that disaster which had terminated so happily.

Once our watch was at leisure, the men began speculating upon the significance of what they were pleased to call an "omen," and those whom I had looked upon as the bravest appeared to be the most disheartened by the mishap.

The breaking of the spar, which was doubtless brought about by some serious defect in the timber, dismayed them, and one and all argued as if eager to prove that the accident was but the forerunner of direst disaster.

Master Joshua looked grave as any owl while he told a yarn of a vessel which had lost a spar while leaving port, and was never heard of afterward, declaring solemnly that the mishap had come about solely as a means of warning the crew not to sail in the craft.

"But if they had already left the port, how would it be possible for the men to go back, even though the captain

had been willing to stand by and see his crew desert?" Simon asked, innocently, whereat Master Joshua fell into a passion, because "a boy" had dared make such foolish inquiries regarding what was as "plain as the nose on a man's face."

"It ain't for the likes of you to be askin' questions about the signs that are sent to sailormen," he roared, shaking his fist at the lad who was simply trying to gain what might prove to be useful information. "Anybody who ain't a natural born fool knows that sich things are seen by them as live on the ocean, an' the pity of it is there are idjuts what can't take warnin'."

"Then you're ready to believe that this 'ere cruise won't be a payin' one, eh?" the captain of Number Four gun asked, seriously.

"Accordin' to what I've seen in this 'ere world, I wouldn't want to put very many hopes on the *America's* ever gettin' into the home port again."

After this gloomy prediction, for such it was because of the tone in which the words had been spoken, all hands began to look down in the mouth, and it can well be imagined that even Simon and I were feeling far from cheerful.

Had any other member of the crew suggested such a possibility, simply because we had carried away a topmast immediately after leaving port, I could have laughed at him; but Joshua Seabury was, to my mind, the ablest seaman afloat, and all he said carried great weight with it, so far as I was concerned.

The old man lighted his pipe in a sorrowful manner, as if saying to himself that the good ship might founder before he could finish his smoke, and the remainder of the crew began to spin yarns regarding signs and omens of which they had heard, until the whole boiling of them were worked up into the most doleful frame of mind.

Had the word been passed just then that a British privateer was in sight, I question if any undue excitement would have been shown by our men, so positive did all appear to be that we were on the eve of some great disaster.

At first Simon and I were disposed to laugh at these senseless forebodings, even though Master Joshua himself had been the first to give them words; but, later, it appeared to me as if much mischief might befall us because the men were so bent on persuading themselves that the carrying away of the topmast, especially on a Friday, was a token that some more than ordinarily serious danger threatened.

It would be reasonable to suppose that every privateersman was in danger so long as he remained afloat searching for the enemy; but to peril which had so good a foundation, these superstitious sailors gave no heed.

It was to them as if we had been protected until the moment after the topmast fell, and then we were not only left to our own devices, but given to understand that we could not escape even the ordinary dangers of the sea.

In reading over what has just been set down, I find that I have failed in giving a good idea of the state of mind into which every man Jack among us had fallen.

Perhaps at the time Simon and I did not fully realise what all this arguing, speech-making, and yarn-spinning on the subject of omens might amount to, but we had more than an inkling when, at a late hour on the second night after the topmast fell, while we were lounging about the deck simply because our watch was supposed to be on duty, Captain Ropes called for us to come aft.

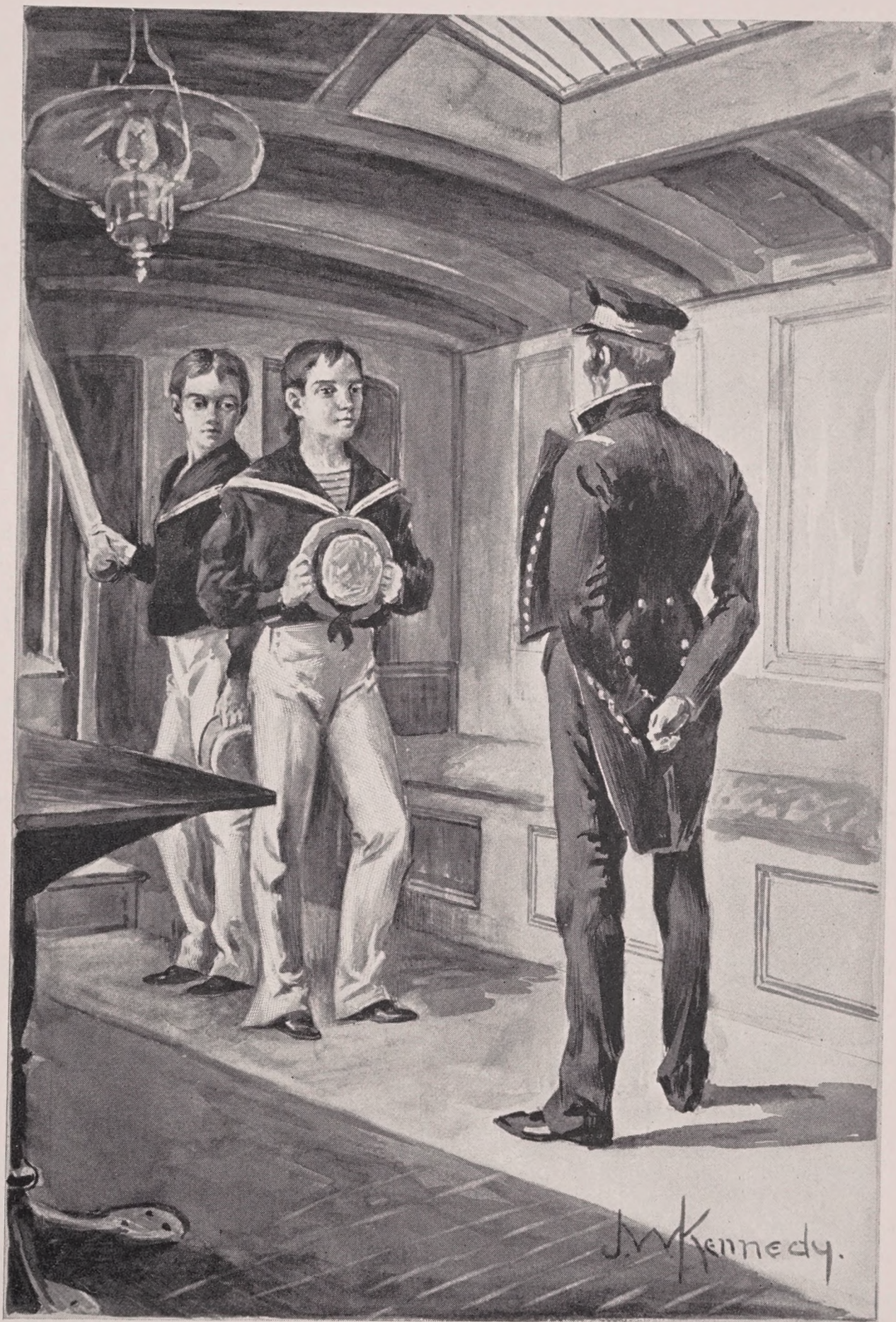
Up to this moment he had given no heed whatsoever to Simon ; it was as if the lad ceased to be a relative of his the moment he came aboard the ship as one of the crew, and I was feeling more than a trifle sore because my comrade's father appeared to be copying so perfectly after Master Josh.

"I'm not asking you lads to tell tales out of school," the captain said, when we had followed him into the after-cabin where he had his quarters ; "but I would like to know if the men are still chewing over the loss of the topmast."

Simon, who had seemingly failed to observe that his father no longer treated him as a son, at once gave a very good description of the situation of affairs forward, and when his story was come to an end the captain dismissed us exactly as he would have dismissed two lads whom he had never met before ; but I guessed that he was disturbed in mind because of the foolish fears of the men.

We two lounged forward again, once we were at liberty, and I would have spoken with Simon concerning his father's odd behaviour, but that the lad cut me short by saying, quite curtly :

"Before coming on board I was told plainly what might



"I AM NOT ASKING YOU LADS TO TELL TALES OUT OF SCHOOL,"
THE CAPTAIN SAID."

be expected, therefore I can't complain. My father first went to sea with an uncle, and now he is giving me the same treatment which he then received."

"But where would be the harm if he allowed us the run of the cabin, now and then?" I asked, petulantly. "It would please me right well to sit at his table once or twice in a week."

"That you will never do while we are members of the crew," Simon replied, with a laugh, "and perhaps it is quite as well."

"I'd like to know how you can figure that out?" and now I was grown quite hot. "If my uncle was on board, I venture to say both of us would be eating there every day in the week."

"Which might not be to our advantage. Now the men treat us as belonging to their mess; but if we ate in the cabin while pretending to do duty forward, father says our lives would soon be made burdensome, and surely he ought to know."

To my mind the argument was a feeble one, not worthy a brave man like Captain Ropes; but I held my peace, understanding that it could hardly be pleasing for Simon to hear me criticise his father.

While the crew discussed the supposed ominous omen, I brooded over the fancied injustice of the captain toward Simon and myself, and in a very short time succeeded in believing that I was a veritable victim.

Simon Ropes displayed more sound common sense than all the remainder of us put together, and from that time

when he stood up like a man battling against the fancies and whims of the men, with never one, not even I who counted myself his comrade, to back him, I came to know the lad for the hero he afterward proved himself to be when the decks were slippery with American blood.

Within two days after the topmast had been carried away the men were in very nearly a mutinous mood, some claiming that the *America* should put back sufficiently long to cast off the spell of ill fortune which had been thrown over her, and others declaring that at the first opportunity they would desert, believing they were morally entitled to do so in order to save their own lives.

"If it was only a case of standin' up in a fair fight, no matter how big might be the odds against us, I'd willingly take my chances with the others, because I shipped for such work," one of the younger men of the crew said more than once in my hearing. "But this flyin' in the face of bad luck, with a warnin' plain before us, is more'n I bargained for."

As a matter of course, his messmates should have reported him for uttering words which were well calculated to destroy the discipline of the ship; but it was as if nearly every man on board, save the officers, were in much the same way of thinking.

It was not simply the carrying away of a spar which so disturbed the crew; but, rather, the manner in which it was done, together with the time of the accident, all of which we lads heard discussed during nearly every hour while we were off duty.

The topmast was a new spar, and there was no apparent reason for its breaking; the gale was not heavy enough to cause the mishap, and the men refused to entertain the very reasonable explanation that there had been some defect in the timber, which escaped the notice of the spar-makers.

Then again, the accident had occurred on the first Friday after leaving port, and before we had sighted the sail of an enemy. Such a combination of circumstances, so the old shellbacks declared, was sufficient to stamp the affair as an omen of the most pronounced character.

The fact that all the men who had been aloft were saved, without even so much as a scratch, was brought forward by Simon, whenever the crew would condescend to listen to him, as a good reason why we should look upon the matter as one of good rather than bad significance, but day by day the mutinous talk grew louder.

The topmast had been carried away on the eleventh day of September, and not until the twenty-third of the same month did we fall in with a craft of any description.

The absence of vessels when we were in the track of the enemy's merchant-ships was, to this superstitious crew, only additional proof that they were correct in their fancies.

The sun was just showing himself above the horizon on the day last mentioned, when the lookout shouted what, under different circumstances, would have been most welcome news.

A craft of some description was in sight; but so far away that it was impossible to make out anything save

what, to Simon and I, looked like nothing more than the wing of a sea-bird outlined against the clear sky to leeward.

Certain it is the men would have grumbled had our ship's course not been altered on the instant, and then, when this was done, even before the captain knew what kind of a craft he was steering for, every man Jack of them began making the most dismal predictions.

Now we were to learn the meaning of the omen, the men said, walking moodily to and fro as if certain that death was very close aboard. We would find the stranger an English frigate, at the very least, and the cruise of the *America* as an American vessel would come to an end before sunset.

I believe of a verity that, had we fallen in with a Britisher who carried no greater weight of metal than ourselves, these predictions would have come true, so dispirited were the crew, and while we slowly drew nearer the strange sail, Simon and I stood well forward, burning with the most painful anxiety, fancying we were approaching some terrible doom.

Before two hours had passed, such a lady for sailing was the ship, we could see clearly the topsails of the chase, and the most outspoken grumbler among us declared that she was nothing more formidable than a British merchant-brig.

The majority of the crew began to recover their courage and their spirits ; but a few of the older shellbacks insisted that, whether the stranger was a peaceful merchantman

or a heavily armed privateer, we were about to learn the true meaning of the omen.

And so we did learn the meaning, or, rather, that it had no meaning at all, — at least, nothing that was to work us harm at the beginning of the voyage.

Within an hour of noon we had overhauled and brought to the British brig *James and Charlotte*, Lavitt, master, from Liverpool, bound for St. John's with a cargo of hats, dry goods, and a general assortment of merchandise.

One gun had been fired to bring her to, and no more powder than the single charge was burned in the capture of what all hands knew beyond a peradventure was a valuable prize.

It would have pleased me well had I been allowed to board her; but Captain Ropes was not disposed to spend any idle time when there were, perhaps, other merchantmen to be overhauled.

Without delay a prize-crew of six, under command of Mr. Tibbetts, was thrown on board, after which we stretched away on our course with eleven prisoners in the hold, and the master of the captured brig quartered aft, he having passed his word of honour to make no attempt to communicate with the other Britishers.

The tongues of those off duty began to wag furiously once we stood away from the brig, and now had come the time when those who argued the strongest that we were doomed to some terrible misfortune, and among whom was Master Josh, were forced to bear such ridicule as only a crew of sailormen can invent.

Simon and I believed that the capture of this first prize, which was a rich one, such as should go far toward tasseling our neckerchiefs with dollars, would bring to an end all the mutinous talk we had been hearing, and, during the remainder of this day, we were correct.

Next morning, however, the croakers had decided that one vessel captured was no sign the omen was for the good rather than the bad, and straightway began figuring how the traverse might be worked to bring ruin upon us.

This last stage of the believers in omens was not as serious as the first, since there were very many who contented themselves with reckoning how much would be coming to us from the prize, in case Mr. Tibbetts succeeded in getting her to a home port, and when one sets dollars against old women's whims, the odds are decidedly in favour of the former.

Now from this time out we had so much of drill during fair weather, that the croakers really did not have time to present their foolish views in detail, and we two lads counted on the matter dying a natural death; but in this we were mistaken.

Were I to set down here all we did or said while the *America* cruised here or there, without sighting any save a friendly sail, the words would fill an enormous book, and, when they had been read, would amount to nothing.

Life aboard ship, as Simon and I soon came to understand, grows very monotonous after a certain time, and we who had nothing more exciting than the continual drills with small arms, exercise at the great guns, and

lessons in working ship under every emergency, soon grew sick at heart because of the lack of adventure.

It goes without saying that, during this time of comparative idleness, Simon Ropes and I were educated into very fair sailors, as well as privateersmen, and, before many weeks had passed, came to believe we could hold our own with the oldest shellback on board.

Now and then Captain Ropes condescended to speak with us ; but a stranger would not have believed that my comrade was his son, or I the nephew of the ship's owner.

As a matter of course we two lads were thoroughly instructed as to our duties in event of an engagement, and day after day did we serve the gunners with ammunition, which it was necessary we should carry back to the magazine when the drill was at an end.

When the days lengthened into weeks after the capture of our first prize, and we came across nothing flying the British flag, the croakers sprang up very strong once more, and during our watch below we heard so much about omens and signs that I literally turned sick at heart whenever I came across a group who were harping on the loss of a new topmast on the first Friday after leaving port.

The prisoners must have had a sorry time of it ; they were kept in the hold, except two hours each day when they came up for fresh air and exercise, and I dare venture to say that they longed as heartily as did our crew that another capture might be made, because then their

chances of being sent ashore would be so much the greater.

Simon and I saw but little of these unfortunates, for the very good reason that we kept out of their way so far as possible.

It was by no means pleasant to watch the poor fellows when they came on deck eager and thirsty for a breath of sweet air, and we made it our business to be engaged in some other part of the ship while they were pacing to and fro on deck, guarded by eight or ten men with loaded muskets in their hands.

During all this long, weary time of watching, hoping, and predicting evil, we came to know what a gallant craft was ours.

There was ample opportunity to test her sailing qualities under every condition of weather, and never a man on board who did not come to believe she could overhaul or show her heels to anything afloat.

We skirted along the coast of Portugal, passing the island of St. Michael on the fifth of October, and yet not until a full month later, that is to say, on the sixth day of November, did we sight another craft flying the cross of St. George.

During all this time our croakers had kept their tongues wagging industriously, declaring that the next time we saw the British flag it would be at the topmast head of an English ship of the line, which would speedily verify the predictions represented by the faulty topmast.

It was as if we had been at sea half a lifetime when the

lookout reported a brig-rigged craft to windward, and after she was brought into view of us on deck we knew beyond question that we had almost within our clutches another British craft.

The cruise did not bid fair to be what is known as a "lucky" one if the game was to be found so few and far between; but we were ready to welcome anything that might break the monotony, even though it should be a Britisher that far out-classed us.

A little fighting then, with some blood-letting, would have been good medicine for those who were grown mutinous once more, and I fancied, from what could be told by the expression on the faces of the officers, that a regular battle, providing we might get the best of it, would be welcomed, even though there were no dollars to be gained.

We were not to overhaul this second Britisher without some labour, as we soon came to understand, for the brig was a smart sailer, and more than once before she was brought to did it appear as if she might succeed in giving us the slip, despite the good qualities of our ship.

From ten o'clock in the forenoon until nearly daybreak next morning, we staggered on under full press of canvas, not gaining more than two miles in all that time, and then Master Josh began to breed discontent by declaring that we were astern of no less a craft than the *Flying Dutchman* herself.

"We'll board her even if she's full to the scuppers with ghosts," the boatswain said, smiting his thigh with his

hand as if bent on splintering the bone. "We've had enough of signs an' tokens since this 'ere cruise began, an' I'm comin' to believe that our ill luck is caused by it. I'm not settin' myself up to put this whole ship's company into proper trim; but this much I'll swear to, the next man who begins to croak about what's goin' to happen jest because a cross-grained timber went adrift in a gale, will come mighty nigh havin' to settle the question once an' for all with me. I'm not a fightin' man naturally, neither am I willin' to hear so much chin over nothin' more'n might have been expected."

Both Simon and I were fully prepared to see these words provoke such a quarrel as only the master-at-arms could quell; but to our surprise not a word was spoken in reply. Every man Jack of the croakers held his peace, although there were many among them, notably Master Josh, who might have given the boatswain more of a task than he wanted, had it come to a game of fisticuffs.

Most likely the fact that we were in chase of what might prove a rich prize prevented the men from indulging in a fight; but certain it is that the challenge, for it could be taken as nothing less, was not accepted.

I noted with considerable satisfaction, however, that we heard no more about omens during the remainder of the race, which came to an end about noon, with the British brig *Benjamin* lying to about half a mile to leeward, and Captain Ropes calling off a prize-crew to take her in charge.

This craft, the second we had taken, was bound for

England from Newfoundland, laden with fish, and commanded by James Collins.

We took from her the mate and seven men, leaving on board her captain, one man, and a boy, and sent from the *America* Joseph Dixon and eight men, with orders to make any port in the United States north of Nantucket.

There was no time spent in overhauling the prize. As soon as the prisoners could be brought aboard we were off, leaving Master Dixon to his own devices, so far as keeping clear of British armed vessels was concerned.

Both Simon and I had hoped the prisoners taken from the *James and Charlotte* would be sent away ; but instead of thus clearing the ship, we received an addition of eight others, and, what concerned us two lads most nearly, we were told off to care for the enemy in the way of keeping them supplied with food and water.

It was the most distasteful task ever set me ; but there was no use in trying to cry off from it, and, even had it been ten times worse than really was the case, I would not have uttered a single word of complaint, save, perhaps, to my comrade, for there had been full and plenty of grumbling on this cruise.

Our duties, as we soon learned from the second officer, consisted in carrying from the cook's quarters to the hold the food served out for each meal, and also to have an eye over the prisoners during a certain portion of each day, when the full crew was required to be on deck at the regular drill.

Thus it was that we two lads found ourselves beyond

control of Master Josh, who had not proven himself a very good instructor, owing to the severe attack of fear and grumbling which had come upon him with the carrying away of the topmast, and I for one was not sorry to make the change, although almost any other duty than that of guarding and feeding the prisoners would have been more to my liking.

I could not prevent a certain feeling of pity for these poor fellows, who were thus kept in close confinement for no other reason than that their king was at war with the United States, and it is possible that both us lads did somewhat toward making the imprisonment less irksome at times.

CHAPTER IV.

GHOSTS.

BY waiting upon the prisoners, Simon Ropes and I gained certain information of greater or less value, although there was in the task nothing to give us pleasure.

When it had been announced that we were at war once more with the British king, I believed that all Englishmen were our sworn enemies, as I held it my duty to be theirs ; but before we two lads had been four and twenty hours in our new station aboard the *America*, I came to understand that at least a certain portion of the Britishers were, in a degree, friendly toward us.

As, for instance, these sailors whom we held prisoners complained quite as bitterly as had we, because the king's ships impressed their men, and it really seemed as if the mariners of both countries had equal cause for complaint, although, as a matter of course, it was not as bad in the case of the Britisher to be impressed, in order that he might help defend his country, as it was for the American to be taken against his will into the service of a monarch whom he had no reason to love or respect.

These Britishers, weary of the long imprisonment, were

more than willing to hold converse with us lads, and as we loitered in the dark hold, after having brought their food, we heard many and many a story of cruelty practised by the officers of the English navy against their own people, until it seemed as if the king's subjects had quite as much reason to rise against his Majesty as had we in '76.

However, it is not for me to set down such information as is doubtless known to many of our people already; but I must confine myself to the principal events which occurred while Simon Ropes and I served on board the armed ship *America*, and now has come the time when the most thrilling of our experiences is to be related.

It was on the second night after we had parted company with the *Benjamin*, and there was no more than air enough stirring to give the ship steerageway, while a certain mist hung over the water, partially obscuring the faint light of the stars.

At sunset, not the faintest glimmer of a sail had been seen, in either direction, and while the breeze held so light it was certain nothing would heave in sight, therefore were the men on the lookout more careless, knowing full well their watchfulness would be vain.

Simon and I had come up from the hold about eight o'clock, having loitered there a certain length of time after the guard was changed, in order to talk with the prisoners, and, coming on to the gun-deck, saw there the men separated in little groups, as they had been almost every night since that Friday mishap.

We knew full well what was the subject of their con-

versation or discussion, whichever it might be called, and, wearied with the theme, we continued on to the spar-deck, not minded to hear for the hundredth time what fate befell this craft or that, to whose crew had been given an omen similar to the one which came to us shortly after leaving Salem.

Only a small portion of the watch on duty were awake. There was nothing to be done, and the majority of the men, wearied with the work of the day, were taking advantage of every opportunity for cat-naps, when the officers' backs were turned.

Simon and I, new to the duty of caring for prisoners, were heavy-hearted because of the suffering which we knew the poor fellows were enduring, and felt no desire for slumber. Indeed, had we been so minded, there was nothing to have prevented our turning in at that moment, since we were no longer forced to serve with either watch, save at such times as all hands might be called.

Just abaft the mizzenmast was our favourite lounging-place at such times, and there we went on this night, thinking only of those whom we had left in the ship's hold, forgetting, for the time being, the evil predictions of Master Josh and his messmates.

I was not conscious of gazing in any one direction. In fact, there was nothing to be seen. Owing to the gloom, the men, as they moved listlessly about, appeared to be faint shadows rather than human beings, and the air was so light that we failed to distinguish the break of foam, as the waves swept either side our craft.

It was as if we were motionless, save for the lazy swell on which the ship rose and fell so gently that one was hardly conscious of any movement.

Simon and I were speaking of what had been told us by one of the prisoners, who, three years before, had been taken out of a British merchantman by one of the king's ships.

We discussed the injustice of thus making slaves of free men, and unconsciously, perhaps because of the quiet everywhere around, our voices sank into whispers.

Then it was that suddenly I saw rising out from the fore-castle hatchway a white mass.

I failed to distinguish any semblance of a human form, and yet, even in the darkness could see that this — whatever it might be — occupied no more space than would have been taken up by a man's body.

Fear seized upon me at once, but even in my terror and bewilderment, I wondered how it was possible for me thus plainly to discern anything at such a distance, while the darkness was so dense as to prevent my seeing members of the watch standing near at hand.

Just for an instant I fancied myself the victim of a delusion; but as I sat bolt upright, gazing forward with my very heart in my eyes, Simon Ropes grasped me by the arm nervously, yet firmly.

Then I knew that he had seen the same shape, and was no less alarmed than I.

An exclamation of fear from out the darkness, twenty paces or more away, told that we two were not the only



"SUDDENLY I SAW, RISING OUT FROM THE FORECASTLE HATCH-
WAY, A WHITE MASS."

ones who had seen this strange sight, and immediately came a hail from the quarter-deck :

“Who’s that yelling like a baby?”

“Its me ; Tim Stubbs.”

“What’s the matter?”

“There’s a ghost, sir, come out of the fore-castle hatch.”

“Have you turned fool?” the officer asked, angrily, and I dimly understood that it was Mr. Fernald, the second mate, who was speaking.

“It’s a ghost all the same, sir,” the man replied, in quavering tones, while at that moment the shape, or whatever it might be, seemed to fade away, and on the instant was gone.

“It is out of sight now, sir,” some one shouted from near the foremast ; “but it was a ghost all the same, an’ that I’ll swear to!”

“Get below there, Stubbs, an’ see who’s trying to make a fool of you,” Mr. Fernald cried, whereat the sailor slouched slowly off, muttering to himself, and I knew full well that if any search was to be made Tim Stubbs would not be the one to conduct it.

Immediately the apparition, if so it can be called, had vanished, one could hear from this point and that on deck the voices of the men in hoarse whispers or mutterings, thus showing that nearly all of the watch had seen the singular thing.

Mr. Fernald most likely understood that the discipline of the ship depended upon putting an end to any such fancy as that we had a ghost aboard.

Not contenting himself with having ordered Stubbs below, he ran forward at full speed, calling loudly for a lantern as he dropped through the forecastle hatch.

I doubt if a single member of the watch followed him.

There had been so much talk of omens and signs since the first Friday that the minds of the men were in good condition to believe whatsoever smacked of the superstitious, and at the moment — ay, for many a long day afterward — I was firmly convinced that the form which had risen through the hatchway was not of this earth.

What with the shouting of the mate, his rapid footsteps on the deck as he ran forward, and the muttering of the men, no little disturbance was created, thanks to the stillness of the night, and while Simon and I crouched abaft the mizzenmast, not daring to so much as speak, we heard Captain Ropes's voice as he came up from the cabin :

"What's goin' on here?" he asked of the helmsman, and the latter replied, as if giving the most commonplace information :

"There's a bloomin' ghost for'ard, sir, an' the second officer's gone to catch him."

The captain gave vent to an exclamation of impatience, and striding to the break of the quarter-deck, he shouted :

"Forward there!"

"Ay, ay, sir," came from a dozen voices.

"What's the cause of this disturbance?"

"There's a ghost in the forecastle, sir."

I heard the captain literally snort as he smothered an exclamation of anger, and a moment later he asked :

"Where is Mr. Fernald?"

"Gone after the ghost, sir."

"What do you mean by that?" was the angry question.

"There was a big something white popped up out of the fo'castle, sir, an' it smelled like a graveyard."

"There was regular fire come out of its face," another added, whose imagination was more vivid.

"Let's go back an' tell father what we've seen," Simon whispered to me, and I caught at the suggestion eagerly, anxious to hear what explanation the captain might make of the strange thing which had appeared to us.

Silently as possible, lest the men should think we were gone aft talebearing, the lad and I moved back to the break of the quarter-deck, and were close at the captain's feet before he observed us.

"Who is that?" he asked, peering down, and Simon replied:

"It's me, father, and Nathan Crowninshield. We saw what the man called a ghost, and were frightened by it."

"Then you had best go ashore when next we make port, an' say that you are not fitted for sailormen," the captain cried, sharply. "Are you all turned fools that a shadow shall persuade you there's a ghost aboard?"

"It was not a shadow, sir," I made bold to say. "Simon and I were sitting just abaft the mizzenmast, and I saw something white rise out of the forecastle hatchway, even before any one spoke. Then it disappeared as the men began calling one to another."

"What was it like?" the captain asked, with a scornful laugh.

"Like nothing, sir," Simon replied. "It was simply a white shape, but there was no fire about it, as one of the men has stated, neither did I detect any odour."

"Of course you didn't, because there was nothing in the hatchway. Most likely it was a reflection of the canvas."

"How could there be a reflection on a night like this, sir?" a voice asked from out the darkness. "This 'ere is worse than a fog-storm for smother, an' if them as were amidships saw something come out of the fore-hatchway, it is more than could be done if one of the crew was nearabout there."

All this was truth, as I realised on the instant.

Strain my eyes as I might, it was impossible to see the figure of the speaker, and yet I knew full well that the white form in the hatchway had loomed up clearly, not indistinctly, as it would seem should be the case if it were a gleam from a piece of canvas.

Before the captain could reply to the sailor, Mr. Fernald came aft carrying a lighted lantern, and Simon's father asked, impatiently:

"Well, what did you find?"

"Nothing, sir. I reckon some of the men must have been playing pranks."

"They will have cause to regret anything of the kind, if I can catch them at it," the captain said, angrily, and then, wheeling about, went straight into the cabin, followed

by the second officer, who doubtless understood, as did I, that Simon's father preferred the report should be made where none of the crew might overhear.

Once the two officers left the deck, it was as if every man's tongue had suddenly been unloosed, and the watch below, most likely disturbed by the running about, came pouring up to learn the cause of the unusual noise.

Then it was we learned the result of the second officer's search.

Some of the men had seen him come down with the lantern and search about the gun-deck, but it was certain he failed to find anything.

Now it can well be fancied into what a state of excitement we were plunged, Simon and I among the others.

Those who had clung to the belief that the carrying away of the topmast was an omen of ill fortune declared the apparition in white to be a second warning, and I question if there was a man forward of the cabin who did not feel decidedly uneasy in mind.

It was nearly morning before Simon and I could compose ourselves sufficiently to turn in, and when, after a short time of slumber broken by most disagreeable dreams, I leaped out of the swinging bed, it was only to find the men in such a mental condition as it is difficult to describe.

The crew of the *America*, who had deemed themselves a fit match for twice their number of Britishers, were vanquished by a defective spar, and a something the character of which I could not then decide upon.

Nor was it possible for Simon and I to laugh at their fears.

We knew full well that there had been a form in the hatchway which showed itself even amid the gloom, and no one could give it a name.

Perhaps, if Mr. Fernald had not made an immediate search, we might have persuaded ourselves that some one of the crew had been playing a trick ; but as it was, there had not been sufficient time elapse from the vanishing of the apparition until the first officer went below with the lantern for any mischief-maker to have concealed himself.

It is not my intention to make any attempt at setting down here all that was said on the subject during the day. There is not time enough in my life to write all the foolishness I heard before nightfall.

Both my comrade and myself had given little heed to the carrying away of the topmast on Friday ; but the whiteness in the hatchway was something which disturbed us greatly, and I literally trembled when we were forced to go into the dark hold to feed the prisoners.

The day passed without mishap or important event, however.

From the officers we heard nothing whatsoever concerning the matter, and the men talked about it altogether too much to please me.

We saw no sail during this day, and when night came the ship was bowling along before a six-knot breeze, which should have blown from our minds all the fancies that had taken possession of them.

But the darkness found us one and all more given over to superstitious fears than before.

Both watches remained on deck, and I knew that not a man loitered below, unless he took especial precautions to hide himself, for when Simon and I came up from our task in the hold, no person could be seen on the gun-deck.

From the eldest to the youngest they shunned the darkness, and seemed to believe safety could be found only in the open air.

Simon and I, having discussed the singular subject during the day until we were sick and tired of it, were stretched at full length just under the break of the quarter, amidships, listening to the buzz of voices around us, and hearing now and then a hum of conversation from the officers aft, who were pacing to and fro in couples, as if fearing that this new phase of affairs might breed trouble.

It was a time when one would say the most adroit could not play a trick, and yet suddenly, as distinctly as if the words had been bawled through a speaking-trumpet, came the cry :

“Put back ! The cruise is ended !”

For a single instant after the words rang out clear and sharp, not a sound could be heard save the seething waves as the stem of the ship divided them, or the whistling of the wind amid canvas and cordage.

Then came a quick, angry cry from the captain :

“Let every man come aft ! Every one of you ! We’ll break up this tomfoolery before I’m many hours older !”

It was much as if the crew were eager to obey the

order, and in a twinkling the ship was crowded near the break of the quarter, until Simon and I were like to be trodden upon.

Then came a command which we could not hear, and immediately afterward the second and third officers went forward.

I understood full well that the captain counted on finding some one skulking forward, who was trying to work upon the fears of the men, which had been aroused by the apparition of the night previous.

However, in case the officers failed to find any one nearabout the hatchway from which the voice seemed to come, it would hardly be a fair test, since any one of those forward might have spoken the words, although not without having been detected by some of his companions.

At all events, the search was carried on evidently with great care, for fully fifteen minutes elapsed before the two officers reappeared, and meanwhile Simon and I, being sorely crowded against the break of the quarter, had made bold to clamber up, by the aid of the men, until we could sit upon the edge of the deck.

We were not more than six feet distant from Captain Ropes when the officers made their report, and I distinctly heard Mr. Fernald say :

"We found nothing, sir. There is not a man below save those in the hold who are guarding the prisoners."

"Where are the cooks?" the captain cried.

"Here, sir! Here, sir! Here, sir!" came from as many different points amid the throng.

“Divide your watches, Mr. Fernald! Let us see who is skulking!” the captain added, a moment later.

Those belonging to the starboard watch were sent to the starboard side, and those in the port watch, opposite, until the men were ranged in double lines from the quarter-deck forward, Simon and I taking our places with the rest, after which the captain and Mr. Fernald made a tour of inspection.

This investigation did not please Simon’s father, as was shown when it had come to an end, and he called for us two lads to follow him with lanterns, while Mr. Fernald was to write down each man’s name as he stood in line.

In this manner, after considerable time had been spent, a list of the crew was written out, including the helmsman, who, as a matter of course, had not left his station.

Then we went below; found the guards on duty, and added their names to the list.

This done, the captain went on deck, and after he had counted the written names, as I knew because Simon and I held the lanterns that he might see clearly, he advanced to the break of the quarter, and said:

“It is clear to me, my men, that there is some one on board bent upon doing a mischief. You from Massachusetts have heads too hard to believe that there may be such things as ghosts who show themselves in the darkness and shout with human voices. It is not necessary for me to tell you, as I would children, that such things are impossible,—that one who has left this world has no desire to return. It would be a foolish sailorman

who, having gotten into a better place, should care to come back, particularly on board ship. I repeat that some one of you is trying to do a mischief, and warn all hands that before many hours have passed I will discover the offender. Then you may be certain there will be such punishment dealt out as won't soon be forgotten. If, however, the guilty man chooses now to acknowledge what is little less than a crime, he shall be forgiven; but let him hold his peace five minutes longer, and he will wish he had never shipped on board the *America*."

The captain paused as if really expecting that some member of the crew would step forward and acknowledge that he had played the part of ghost; but not a man moved.

I saw the old shell-backs look curiously at each other, some of them with an expression on their faces which told plainly that, unless the ghost himself came forward, the captain would gain no information.

Well, Simon's father waited while one might have counted twenty, and then said, in a voice which was far from firm, because of the efforts to control his anger:

"The starboard watch may go below, and since it is a pleasure for some one here to act the part of ghost, I will see to it that he is converted into one before four and twenty hours have passed! Unless you were all old women, there would be no necessity for any words. You would know full well how ridiculous all this flummery is; but since you have turned women and are ready to tremble at the lightest sound, declaring it comes from another

world, I will see to it the offender is brought up with a round turn. In addition, I'll give that man who talks too much about this foolishness a round dozen by way of reminding him that there's nothing ghostly in the lash of the cat. Now get below !”

The starboard watch obeyed on the instant, and Simon and I, thinking it might not be well to loiter on deck while the captain was in such a temper, followed them.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRISONERS.

I HAVE made an attempt at describing the general situation on board the *America* while her crew had nothing more alarming to wag their tongues over than the carrying away of the topmast, but have spent my time in vain trying to show how they twisted that mishap into the ugliest kind of an omen.

Previous to the appearance of the supposed ghost, it seemed as if the conduct of the crew could not be more mutinous unless, indeed, they had risen with deadly intent against their officers; but now we two came to understand that the former condition of affairs was as nothing compared with the present.

Then the men had no more weighty subject for conversation than something which was really not out of the common, unless one chose to so twist it in his mind, and there remained ample opportunity for argument and individual belief.

Now, however, the situation was changed.

There was no opportunity for argument as to what had been seen and heard, since every man Jack of us could do no less than give the same evidence.

It was no longer an omen which might be construed equally well to mean good or evil ; but a fact, to which the officers could testify as well as the men.

When the starboard watch gained the gun-deck, after having been so soundly rated by the captain, it was as if each man was paralysed with fear by that mysterious thing which had come upon us.

During many moments no one spoke. Each seemed to be waiting for the other, and not daring to venture a remark until the conversation had been opened.

Those of the men whose hammocks were slung well forward clustered aft, where some of the elder members of the watch were lighting their pipes preparatory to a smoking-match, when, as we lads knew full well, all the occurrences of the evening would be discussed.

None of the crew appeared willing to remain in the vicinity of the forward hatchway, and more than one sat facing aft, lest there might yet be some horrible thing to be seen in the bow of the ship.

During this time of silence the thought came to me suddenly that Captain Ropes himself must have been in a certain degree impressed by the voice, else would he have tried to convince the men that it was nothing supernatural, instead of railing at them as he did.

The mind of a sailorman can be coaxed into almost whatsoever channel you will ; but it is not often possible to force it.

Simon remained very near my side, and I was truly thankful that he did so, because it seemed to me as if

I really needed close contact with some human being upon whom I could rely, in order to aid me in warding off the terrible thing which appeared to threaten all on board.

When the men's tongues were finally loosened, there was no loud talking, no angry exclamations, no vehement putting forth of this or that opinion ; all hands were subdued and solemn as though taking part in some religious service the precise nature of which they did not understand, and throughout the entire night — for no man so much as dreamed of turning in — never a voice was raised to a high key.

Even Master Josh, who ordinarily felt bound to make himself heard from one end of the gun-deck to the other whenever he put forth an opinion, was as low-voiced as any woman, and failed to assert the authority which he usually claimed belonged to him by virtue of age and experience.

I might fill many pages while attempting to describe the scene which was presented by the starboard watch during the time allotted it below, and afterward by those of the port watch when they came off duty, and yet not succeed in portraying the situation as it really presented itself to Simon and me.

Therefore I will make no further effort at picturing it ; but content myself by saying that it was as fearsome a night as I have ever experienced, and since that day both Simon and I have been in some exceedingly painful situations.

There were two facts prominent in the minds of all.

First, that some ghostly visitor had come aboard, and second, that it was necessary for the safety of all the *America* be immediately steered on a direct course for home.

On these two points there was no difference of opinion ; but concerning the outcome many were disposed to take the most gloomy view.

I believe of a verity that a full half of the crew were convinced we should never see port again ; that the ship and all on board were doomed beyond the shadow of hope.

With such ideas in their minds, the men were in a most dangerous frame of mind.

But few words were needed to bring about a veritable mutiny, and had a single one of them offered himself as leader, I have no question but that an attempt would have been made, within the hour, to force Captain Ropes to do the bidding of those who should have obeyed him.

One can well fancy how much blood would have been spilled in event of an uprising, and, bearing this evident fact in mind, it is not difficult to image the feelings of Simon and myself as we stood betwixt that most terrible tragedy of the sea — a mutiny — and the approaching doom foretold by the ghostly visitor.

As I have said, no man occupied his hammock that night, and those who had not remained on deck during the entire time of darkness sought the open air with the first dawning of day.

As may be expected, Simon and I followed them, for we were not minded to remain alone on the gun-deck, where it was yet dark, and I looked forward with dread to the

hour when we must go into the hold to carry the prisoners' food.

Captain Ropes and his officers must have been well aware of the dangerous condition of mind into which the men were fallen, for no less than three paced the quarter-deck constantly, and when an order was given they took extra care that it should be obeyed promptly, as if fearing lest the first indication of such delay as might be counted for insubordination should prove to be the match that exploded a magazine of fear and passion.

I observed, too, that all the officers carried their side-arms as they would have done on the eve of an engagement, and they kept vigilant watch upon every one of us.

As a matter of course, it would have been impossible to prevent the men from talking among themselves ; but I noticed that, when there was any disposition on the part of the crew to gather into little groups, some order was given which would necessitate their separation, and much useless work laid out as if for no other purpose than to keep our time fully occupied.

It was like unto standing upon the summit of a volcano which threatens to belch forth flame and death at any instant, and the minutes were to me as hours.

Then the word was passed from the cook-house that breakfast for the prisoners had been made ready, and Simon and I went very unwillingly to take charge of it.

It was evident that even we two lads would not be allowed to loiter in our work, for Mr. Fernald called sharply after us, as we were going slowly forward :

“Bear a hand there, lads! There is to be no sodgerin’ this mornin’!”

We quickened our pace, Simon whispering to me, as we did so:

“I wonder if he would step out lively in case it was his duty to go below alone.”

“He did last night, when all the money in the world wouldn’t have tempted me to drop through the fore-hatch.”

“That was because he had to do so, or own himself a coward before the captain.”

“And we are in exactly the same plight,” I said, taking heart as he grew timid. “While it is a fact that I’m afraid to go below, I’d give up all my share of prize-money rather than let Mr. Fernald understand exactly what is in my mind.”

Like all imaginary dangers, this venturing into the hold of the ship amounted to nothing, and when we were come to the prison, which on board vessels is called the “brig,” I breathed more freely, for, having once descended through the hatch where had appeared the apparition, courage began to return.

The sailors who had acted as guard during the night welcomed our coming, and went on deck as soon as might be, eager to learn the cause of the disturbance during the evening previous.

We two lads were now in charge of the Britishers, and, save when they were taken on deck for exercise, would be held responsible for their safety until night came once more.

We served out the food as usual, and while doing so it appeared to me as if one man was presenting himself a second time for the allowance, whereupon I asked:

"Were you not the third in line when we began to serve breakfast?"

"If I had been you wouldn't see me here now, because I'd be workin' my jaws over the scanty allowance."

"There is nothing scanty about it," Simon cried, indignantly. "You are receiving the same amount of food as does any member of our crew."

"Well, I'm not grumbling except you are trying to cheat me out of my portion," the man said, half apologetically, and without further ado I handed him a pannikin, for we carried each man's allowance in a separate dish, to the end that the stronger might not take advantage of the weaker, saying to myself as I did so:

"If that fellow has been served, as I fancy, we shall come out short before all are fed."

A moment later it appeared that I had wronged the man, for nineteen pannikins had been passed into the brig, which was exactly the number necessary if each prisoner was to receive one.

Even with this proof I felt puzzled, for it surely seemed as if one man had gotten a double allowance, and, without really intending to do so, I counted the prisoners as they were squatting here or there busily engaged with the meal.

There were but eighteen.

Again I counted, arriving at the same conclusion.

It did not seem possible one man alone could have

escaped, for if such an opportunity had presented itself, why did not some of the others take advantage of it. And yet where was this nineteenth prisoner?

On board the ship, as a matter of course.

Therefore, so I argued to myself quickly, if there had been an escape, it must have occurred after Mr. Fernald searched the ship on the evening previous, when was heard that strange voice, and yet the door of the brig was securely fastened, while two men had, supposedly, kept watch all night.

Now it came to me that I might be mistaken, although that was hardly probable, and beckoning to Simon to come aft with me to such a distance from the prisoners that the words could not be overheard, I asked him the question:

"How many prisoners did we take from the *James and Charlotte*?"

"Twelve all told," he replied. "Eleven came down here, and the captain went into the cabin."

"How many came to us from the *Benjamin*?"

"Eight, and they are all here."

"That should make nineteen," I repeated half to myself.

"Ay, of course it does. What have you in your head now?"

"Go and count the Britishers."

"I can do that as I stand here," and Simon commenced, stopping when he had ended with eighteen, and beginning over again.

"Is there one missing?" he asked, as if doubting the evidence of his own senses.

Well, we puzzled over that matter half an hour or more, examining every portion of the brig without allowing the prisoners to understand what we were about, and it was impossible to arrive at any other conclusion.

There were but eighteen men in the brig, and yet the prison remained as it ever had been, so secure that anything larger than a cat could not have gotten out.

Then we went aft a short distance, to discuss the matter, and Simon repeated again and again this question:

“What could it advantage a man to escape from the brig, in case an opportunity presented itself? By so doing he would shut himself off from taking exercise in the open air once a day, and stand a chance of getting mighty hungry.”

“Now I am positive that the fellow to whom I spoke took two allowances.”

“How can it avail the man who is free, if there be one outside? With a guard kept night and day, nothing could be passed out from the brig.”

I failed to answer his question, yet the fact remained that, apparently, one of the prisoners was missing, and lest we should have made a mistake in supposing nineteen had been confined in the brig, I proposed to go quietly on deck and ask some one of the men the same questions I had asked Simon.

He, however, refused to be left alone, and I did not count him a coward because of his fears.

What with the apparition and ghostly voice, and the possibility that a Britisher might be roaming around the

hold ready to make an attempt in case a single sentinel should be left on duty, it was by no means cheerful to take one's chances alone.

Those sailors who had been acting as guard during the night left their muskets, when they went on deck, according to custom, nearabout the ladder leading to the gun-deck, in case we might need them.

Heretofore the weapons had remained undisturbed, because while the door of the brig was firmly secured it did not seem as if we had any use for them.

Now, however, I armed myself with a musket, Simon doing the same, and once more we retired out of ear-shot for consultation.

There was in my mind a very well-defined idea that we should, without delay, acquaint the captain of our discovery, and yet I was eager to first avoid the possibility of a mistake by questioning some of the men as to the number of prisoners we had taken aboard, lest we be laughed at for entertaining cowardly fears.

My mind was in such a whirl, what with one thing and another happening during the past four and twenty hours, that I was not willing to accept as evidence the fact that the cooks had filled nineteen pannikins with food.

I suggested as much to Simon, whereupon he declared that nothing would induce him to remain in the hold alone; but that if I was so eager the matter be settled at once, he would go on deck, leaving me to stand guard.

Then I suddenly came to the conclusion that no great harm could be done, at least during this forenoon when

we were keeping careful watch, and it might be as well that we wait until the prisoners were taken out for exercise.

The Britishers must have understood that there was something unusual in the wind, for it had been our custom to pass the time in conversation with them, whereas we now held ourselves aloof, not even offering to tell them what the weather might be.

They talked in low tones among themselves for awhile, and finally one called out :

“What was the rumpus last night?”

“How did you know there was any?” I asked, thinking to learn how much they had heard.

“A man would need to be both blind and deaf who couldn’t understand something was wrong when all hands were runnin’ back an’ forth. One of the officers came down here and searched the hold as if he’d lost his prize-money.”

“It seems you know more about it than we do, for I could not have said the hold was searched last night.”

“It may have been that your mate was on a tour of inspection ; but at all events he gave this part of the craft a pretty thorough overhauling. Did anything go wrong?”

I was not minded that the prisoners should know in what condition was our crew, lest, if a favourable opportunity presented itself, they might think it possible to rise against us successfully, although it would have been a ridiculous notion for eighteen men, unarmed, to attack

one hundred and fifty, with all the weapons on the ship at their disposal.

Therefore I refused to answer the question by holding my peace, and, most likely understanding that there was some good reason for my silence, the Britishers gave over questioning.

The time had come when a half a dozen or more of our men should come down to take the prisoners on deck for exercise, and when they arrived I was resolved to ask that some of them act in our stead while we went aft for an interview with the captain.

We waited impatiently, Simon and I both puzzling our brains over the supposed fact that one of the Britishers was missing, at the same time that we speculated with fear upon the events of the previous evening.

The hours passed, and no one came to our relief.

The unfortunate men, whose only pleasure, I might almost say comfort, consisted in an hour spent in the open air, began to complain bitterly, and ask us again and again why the necessary exercise was forbidden them.

"We have no reason to suppose that you will not be taken on deck," Simon said, petulantly, after the question had been asked a dozen times. "Unless there may be a chance of taking another prize, some of the crew must surely be here very soon."

These words of my comrade served to explain to my satisfaction why we had been left so long alone.

Beyond a question something had come in sight, and the *America* was in close pursuit, which would explain

why the Britishers were denied their brief time of comparative liberty.

It seemed to me as if it must be two or three hours past noon, when a voice from the hatch which led into the hold cried out :

“Here’s your grub, lads! Come up an’ get it!”

Quickly I ran to the foot of the ladder, shouting Mr. Fernald’s name at the full strength of my lungs, for although it seemed impossible one of the mates would have performed such a task as bringing food from the galley, the voice sounded strangely like his.

No reply was received to my outcries, and when I gained the top of the ladder the gun-deck was deserted.

Nearby the hatchway were the pannikins of food; but I gave no heed to them as I stood gazing around me, rapidly giving way to fear and apprehension.

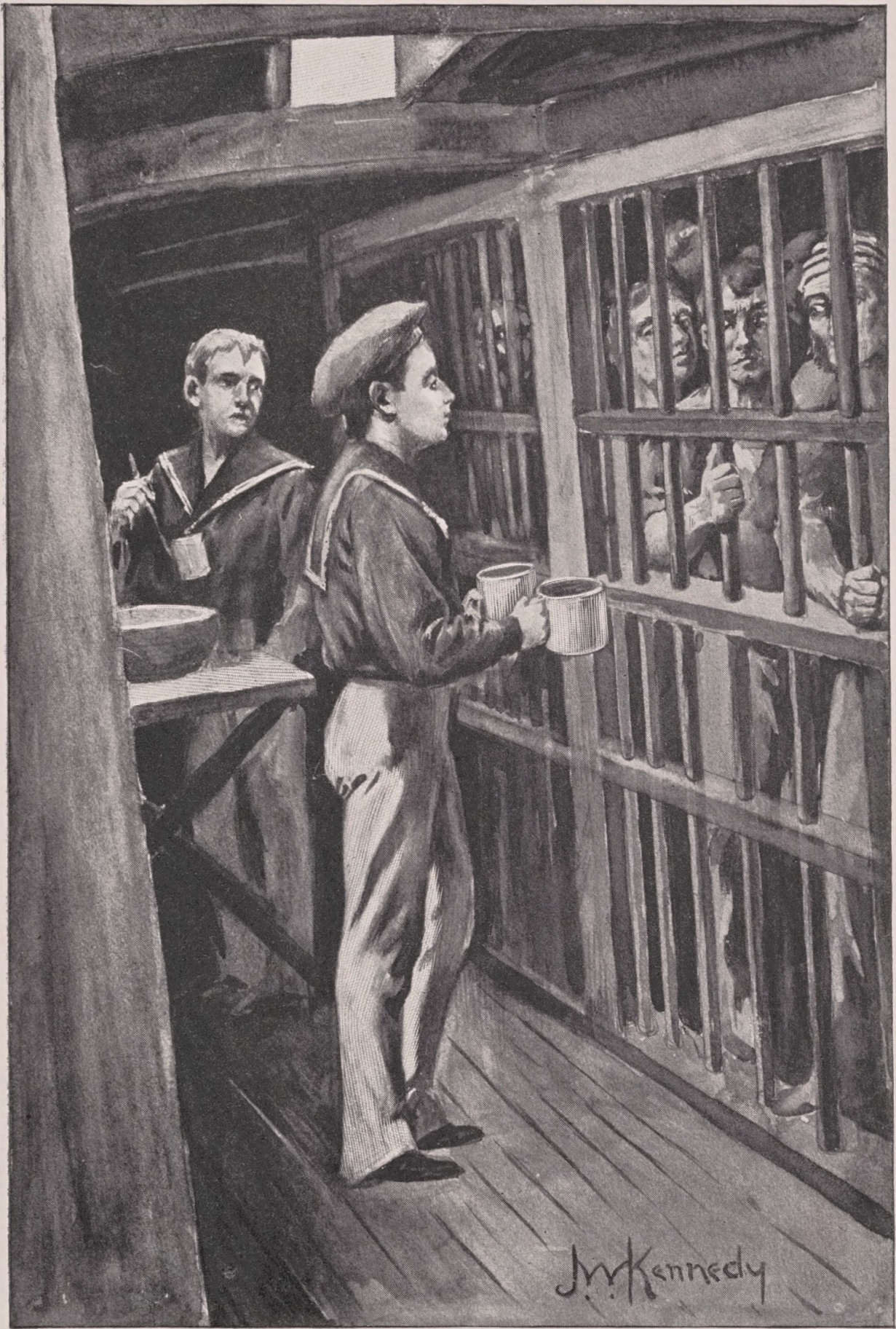
“What’s the matter?” Simon cried, coming hurriedly to the foot of the ladder.

“That’s what I don’t know. Here are the prisoners’ dinners, and yet no one has come to relieve us.”

In silence, and like two stupids, I stood at the top and he at the foot of the ladder, gazing at each other in what was very like terror, and then, understanding that we were giving the Britishers an exhibition of cowardice, I said, sharply :

“If they have neglected us, it is no reason why we should not do our duty. Stand by to take this grub, and I’ll pass it down.”

Simon obeyed, and when all the pannikins were ranged



“WE DON'T COUNT ON GIVING A DOUBLE PORTION TO ANY ONE
OF YOU THIS NOON.”

in front of the brig ready for distribution, I came below, saying to the prisoners as I did so :

“ We don’t count on giving a double portion to any one of you this noon, so form in line and hold your pannikins in plain sight until all are delivered.”

There was in front of the brig a small bar which, on being removed, gave an aperture sufficiently large to pass in food or water, and through this the prisoners were served.

As a matter of course, there was one pannikin left after each man had gotten his portion, and I fancied all the Britishers looked grievously disappointed because we had thus been careful in the distribution of food.

“ What are we to do with this one ? ” Simon asked, lifting the remaining dish.

“ I reckon we had better divide what is in it, for it seems much as if we had been forgotten this day.”

“ But surely they count on relieving us for a time.”

“ They haven’t done so as yet, and whoever brought the grub was in a tremendous hurry.”

“ What do you suppose can be happening on deck ? ” the lad asked, in a whisper, and I, rendered irritable because a similar question was in my own mind, causing me decided fear, replied, sharply :

“ What good can come of our speculating about matters on deck ? We have been set to this work, and should be men enough to take what comes, or get along on what fails us, without grumbling.”

“ It must be they have sighted a Britisher, and are

giving chase," the lad said, as if trying by thus speaking to persuade himself such was the case, while I, now become a prey to gloomy fears, said, without believing what I spoke :

"That must be the reason why whoever brought the grub was in such a hurry to get on deck again."

This reply appeared to satisfy Simon ; but I was very near to believing that the *America's* crew had broken forth in open mutiny.

CHAPTER VI.

A STERN CHASE.

WE two lads were given over to fear and anxiety, as the hours went by and no one came to relieve us.

We had partially satisfied our hunger with the contents of the nineteenth pannikin, and had plenty of water close at hand with which to quench our thirst ; but even though we had suffered for both these necessities, it would have been as nothing compared to the distress of mind while imagining that the worst might be happening on deck.

The prisoners must have understood, both because they had not been taken out for exercise and owing to our being thus neglected, that something serious was in the wind.

For a time they plied us with questions, and then, realising that we either could or would not afford them any satisfaction, gave over the attempt.

I fancied they appeared disturbed, as if it were possible to guess somewhat of the situation, and I also wondered if there were really another man, who, having by some mysterious means gotten out of the brig, lurked about near at hand ready to do whatsoever he might toward releasing his comrades.

Before noon we understood that the wind was increasing in force, for the ship plunged into the deeps of the waves and clambered up again in such manner as told that she was labouring heavily.

Other than by the motion of the craft it was impossible to even guess what might be going on above, save that we might be in pursuit of an enemy.

We knew full well our crew was so strong in numbers that a dozen men might have been spared, even in the midst of the most furious tempest, to relieve us for at least so long as would be necessary to get our dinner.

Because of our mental anxiety, it was impossible to form any fair idea regarding the passage of time; but it seemed to me as if the night must have come, when Simon said, in a whisper, his voice quavering wofully:

“Would you be willing to stay here alone, while I went on deck to learn what may be happening?”

“It seems positive one of the prisoners is outside the brig, and it might be that, when there was only a single boy on guard, he would make an attempt at setting his comrades free,” I replied, rejoicing that I had so valid an excuse to give; for, of a verity, I should have been in sore distress at being forced to remain there alone, even though all the Britishers were safe within the prison.

“I would give much to know why they have seemingly forgotten us,” the lad said, with a long-drawn sigh.

“Then stay here, and I’ll find out in a twinkling.”

“If it is dangerous for you to be here alone, surely I should not be asked to take the chances.”

"I'm not asking you ; but simply showing how we may learn what has happened."

"Some one must come in course of time, no matter how much mischief has been done, and perhaps it is just as well if we wait patiently," he said, with an effort to speak in a cheery strain, and at that instant I could have cried aloud with joy, for the gleam of dull light from the hatchway was shut off by the figure of a man.

It was Tim Stubbs, who had come thus tardily to our relief, and I dare venture to say he was never before greeted so warmly or heartily.

Both us lads ran toward him, laying hold of his garments before he could descend the ladder, as if we feared he might reconsider his purpose of paying us a visit.

"Had quite a long spell of standin' watch, eh, boys?" he cried, cheerily, glancing quickly around, to make certain all was well.

"We've been here all day, and the cooks have even forgotten to bring the prisoners' supper. What is the matter?" I cried, impatiently.

"I reckon the Britishers can hold on till night before they howl for another feed."

"Isn't it dark yet?" Simon asked, in surprise.

"Dark, lad? No, nor it won't be for three or four hours. The crew have just been served with dinner. I got through with my share of the grub first, an' slipped down here without orders, to see how you was comin' on."

"What has happened that you've been kept waiting so

long for something to eat?" Simon cried, and I began to despair of getting any information from this sailor, who had stood our friend ever since we recovered from the attack of homesickness and seasickness.

"First an' foremost, the wind got up a bit, all in a jump, an' we had a lively job gettin' the old hooker snugged down to it. Then we'd no more'n —"

"Have we run into another gale?" Simon interrupted.

"Well, lad, I allow we've got what you might call a leetle more'n half a full breeze, with the chances that there'll be greater weight to the wind before mornin'."

"Was it so bad that, out of all the crew, none could come down here to relieve us a few moments?" I asked, irritably, for there was in my mind a sense of being needlessly neglected.

"Not exactly that, lad; but we'd no sooner snugged her down in good shape, when a Britisher heaves in sight. Nothin' would satisfy the old man but that we must shake two reefs out of the topsails, an' set the main-topgallantsail. It wasn't what you might call easy work, an', accordin' to my thinkin', we're likely to carry away another spar before midnight."

"And you've been at that work all day?" Simon cried, incredulously.

"Well, it amounts to that, for we've humped ourselves lively since the word was given to shorten sail, which didn't come till nigh on to noon. The old man racked his brains all the mornin' to find somethin' to keep us busy, an' you can make up your mind that there was no sod-

gerin' while he stumped the quarter-deck, lookin' sour enough to shame vinegar."

"Why weren't the prisoners taken on deck for exercise?"

"That's a question the captain may best answer. All I can say is, that every man Jack of us has been on the clean jump since you came below. If the old man thinks he can work last night's business out of our heads, he's makin' a big mistake. The port watch had no more'n got below than they fell to jawin' about it livelier than ever. Josh Seabury says there's a chance to save our lives if the *America's* course is changed right soon."

"You'll hardly see the ship heading for home while there's a Britisher in sight, and I should think the men would be ashamed to speak of such a possibility," Simon cried, stoutly, and it was no more than right for him to say whatsoever he might by way of defending his father.

"Well, the Britisher is in sight, an' that's about all you can say," Tim Stubbs replied, reflectively. "We've picked up somethin' this time that ain't to be overhauled in short order. It's a question in my mind which craft is the best sailer. Both of 'em has the same rig, an' it's a toss-up whether we're gainin' ground or fallin' astern."

"Are we carrying much sail?" Simon asked.

"You'll think so when you look aloft. We're dressed out in fine-weather style, with every rag tuggin' at the spars fit to jump 'em clean out of the old hooker, even if they was the best timber ever cut. If the *America* holds

all her sticks till mornin', I'll be willin' to say that I didn't hear any ghost's voice last night, nor see a bit of white in the fore-hatchway."

"Is it a ship we're chasing?" I asked, with a view of preventing Stubbs from dwelling on that very disagreeable happening.

"Ay, lad, an' a clipper. I counted that the *America* could outsail anything that ever floated; but she's come mighty nigh to meetin' her match this time. I'll venture to say there isn't the difference of half a cable's-length betwixt us and her, from what there was when she first hove in sight. She brought down a fog bank with her, an' was showin' topgallantsails when we sighted. It ain't any two to one but that she carries as much metal as we, an' even if we overhaul her, there won't be any child's play to follow."

"If the Britisher is well armed, why should she run away?" Simon asked, now grown so interested in the chase that the fears which had assailed him were almost forgotten.

"Most likely she can't make up her mind how heavy we are, or she may have no stomach for a fight jest now; but it's certain that we won't put a prize-crew on board, if it so be we overhaul her, which I misdoubt, without payin' a good price for the privilege."

It can well be imagined that the prisoners were listening eagerly to all Stubbs was saying.

We three had remained near the foot of the ladder, within four or five yards of the door of the brig, and the

sailor spoke in a tone so loud that they could not fail to catch every word.

As I came suddenly to realise this once more, my thoughts went back to the fact that one of the men had succeeded in getting out of the prison, and straightway the desire to give such information to the captain or Mr. Fernald grew strong within me.

For an instant I made up my mind to explain the situation to Stubbs, but checked myself as I came to understand that it was my duty to first make the captain acquainted with what we had learned.

"Is there any good reason why you can't hold on here for a spell?" I asked, abruptly, interrupting the sailor as he was about to tell us more regarding the chase.

"There's no knowin' when all hands may be called, an' while the old man has got such a lively bee in his bonnet I wouldn't like to be missin' when wanted."

"But it isn't reasonable to keep us here all day on a stretch, without food, when there are so many aboard who must be idling," I cried, hotly.

"I grant you that, lad; but it's the captain's business to send orders that you be relieved."

"If you'll stand here five minutes, I'll tell the captain what you are doing, and why we pressed you into service," Simon said, eagerly, whereupon I, believing that one of the prisoners was probably lurking about close at hand ready for mischief, understood that it would not be safe for Stubbs to remain on duty alone unless we had first warned him of the possible danger.

"Stubbs shall stay here with me, and you may go on deck, Simon," I cried, giving my comrade a look which I hoped he would understand as meaning that he was to acquaint his father with what we had learned.

The lad nodded his head as if in reply to my glance, and, without waiting for the sailor's permission, ran up the ladder at full speed.

I asked Stubbs if the men still felt disturbed by last night's occurrences, whereupon he replied, in a tone which plainly told that he thought me a simple for venturing such a question :

"After you've seen a thing, an' heard a thing speak, how're you goin' to get it out of your head, simply because the captain gives the command that you must? We'll allow that the carryin' away of the topmast on a Friday didn't signify nothin', an' that Josh Seabury is way off his reckonin' when he holds that it was a warnin' for us to bring this 'ere cruise to an end. That leaves us free an' clear up to last night, when that bloomin' thing popped out of the fore-hatchway. Now you'll agree, as must every honest man, that shadows don't show white, an' stars can't throw out any light when the mist covers 'em entirely. It couldn't be anything more or less than a ghost, lad."

"But there are no such things, Stubbs!" I cried, hoping to convince myself by speaking in a loud tone. "No one but a foolish old shellback like Master Joshua would ever allow that there are ghosts."

"When you see a thing, you're bound to believe in it,

no matter what any one else may say," the sailor replied, stubbornly. "But as Josh Seabury asks: Allowin' that all hands of us fell to dreamin', an' neither you, nor me, nor the rest of the watch saw anything, what do you make of the order for us to put back to port? Who or what was it yelled the words in sich a way as no livin' man can yell, an' what did the thing mean by sayin' the cruise was ended?"

It would have been better for my own peace of mind if I had not brought the conversation around to this point.

Instead of convincing Stubbs there were no such things as ghosts, he had, by repeating Master Joshua's arguments, almost persuaded me that we had seen and heard a veritable spirit, whose mission it was to warn us of impending danger.

I fell silent, and the sailor began filling his pipe as he walked toward the prison, bent on holding friendly converse with those who, through the unlawful acts of the king, had unwittingly become our enemies.

The Britishers questioned him eagerly concerning the chase, and he freely gave the desired information, discussing with them the chances of overhauling the ship, which he appeared to consider were very slight.

I did not care to listen, even though I burned to learn all that had taken place while Simon and I were forced to remain in the darkness.

Talking with Stubbs concerning the events of the previous evening had aroused all my nervous fears, and I was quite prepared to believe that whosoever had es-

caped from the brig was making ready to attack us, although what might have been gained if all the prisoners were at that moment released from the brig, I could not have explained.

Standing with my back to the ladder lest some one might creep up from behind, and my musket ready for immediate use, I waited, feverishly impatient, for Simon's return.

He came after perhaps half an hour had passed, although the time seemed to me much longer than that, and I saw at once he had failed in his purpose.

"You didn't speak with your father!" I cried, in a tone of reproof, and indeed for the instant it was to me as if the lad had failed because of negligence.

"It couldn't be done," he said in a half-whisper. "Word has been passed that none of the crew are to come aft even so far as the break of the deck, without being summoned, and the third officer stands there, holding for dear life on the mizzen-shrouds, lest the heavy waves sweep him over the rail, to stop any who dare make the venture."

"I should have tried it at all hazards. There isn't an officer on board who would have prevented you from gaining speech with your father."

"That was what I believed, but soon learned my mistake. The boatswain pulled me back, and when I told him that I must speak with the captain at once on important business, he swore he'd put me in irons if I didn't go forward."

"What is the meaning of such orders?" I asked, indignantly, and Simon whispered in my ear:

"Master Joshua told me the port watch had sworn the ship should be put about without loss of time, and were making for the quarter-deck when the captain and two of the mates drove them back at the point of their pistols. It's little less than mutiny, and the men openly admit as much."

"But surely you wouldn't be mistaken for a mutineer!"

"The third officer and the boatswain must obey orders, and you know full well that I don't count as being the captain's son while we're members of the crew."

Surely the situation must be serious if such precautions had been taken, and I said to myself that the cruise was indeed likely to be ended very shortly, omens or no omens, unless there was a speedy change in affairs.

Then, after a pause, and rather for the sake of continuing a conversation than because I had any real curiosity regarding the matter, I asked:

"Did you see the Britisher?"

"Ay, and she's staggering under the same canvas as we. It doesn't seem possible either craft can stand up very long under such a press of sail. It is blowing a full gale; our decks are awash, and the ship is burying herself to such an extent that every third or fourth wave sweeps over her from stem to stern. It's enough to make a fellow turn pale with fear, to stand there five minutes watching the surge towering on either hand, ahead and astern, even above the mastheads. Twice, while trying to make my way aft, I was like to being washed overboard. Some of the men say that my father is doing his best to make

LdC.

good the words spoken by the ghost last night, for it surely seems as if the cruise would be ended very shortly."

Simon's courage was no better than mine, and verily we were an unhappy pair.

At that moment there came before my eyes a picture of the home in Salem where my mother awaited the return of her son, and I wondered why I should have been such a fool as ever to leave her when there was no real need for so doing.

Then I bethought me of our own immediate trouble, and asked, angrily :

"Did you learn why we have been left here so long? Are we to be starved?"

"I question much if those aft remember that we were left in charge of the prisoners, or, remembering it, if they suppose that we have not been relieved."

"If both watches have been kept on deck since daylight, who could have taken our places?" I cried, angrily.

"With a veritable mutiny on hand, a gale of wind, and a Britisher to be caught, we two lads don't cut any great figure on board just at present," Simon replied, with a faint smile, and then I understood that his heart was even more sore than mine, because of having been denied the privilege of going aft, particularly since he had seldom made the attempt.

Tim Stubbs discovered about this time that he should be on the gun-deck, and would have left us hurriedly but that I clutched at his arm, holding him sufficiently long to ask :

“Do you intend that we shall spend four and twenty hours here alone, with nothing to eat?”

“It isn’t anything I can help, lad. I’ll speak to the bo’sun about it, if I get the chance.”

Then he freed himself from my grasp and was gone, leaving Simon and me gazing discontentedly into each other’s eyes.

Lest he who chances to read these lines should be brought to think that Simon Ropes and I were babies, who could not remain on duty twelve hours at a stretch without weeping and wailing over it, let me call attention to the general situation, which was sufficient to take the heart out of lads far stronger than we two.

Had it been necessary for us to stand guard four and twenty hours, or even twice that length of time on a stretch, because we were in pursuit of an enemy, the labour would have seemed as nothing. Or, had any ordinary event in a sailorman’s life rendered it important that we should perform even a more laborious task, not a word of complaint would have been heard from our lips.

It was the nameless dread which had come upon us since the evening previous; the haunting fear that one of the prisoners was lying in wait to make a sudden attack; the possibility that the men might rise in mutiny,—it was all these which rendered us timid and peevish.

We gave way to terror unnecessarily at this particular time, however, for Tim Stubbs had hardly more than left

us before two old shellbacks came down to relieve us, stipulating, as we hastened toward the ladder in our eagerness to breathe the fresh air once more, that we should bring them news of the chase from time to time.

"We'll keep you posted," I cried, "and you in turn are to be on the alert every instant. Have your muskets where they may be come at handily, and be quick at facing about in case you hear any unusual noise from behind."

Some of the prisoners looked at me oddly as I gave this advice, which was as near as I cared to come at revealing what I believed to be the true state of affairs, and one of the sailors asked :

"Have you lads grown chicken-hearted from bein' down here in the dark? What need have we of muskets while the Britishers remain safe behind them 'ere wooden bars?"

"There's no knowing what might happen," I replied, speaking gravely in order that the words should have more weight. "It isn't safe to think everything is in proper order when there's a chance that appearances may be deceitful."

I was looking full in the face of one of the prisoners as I spoke, and it seemed to me that the fellow changed colour; but of this I could not be positive.

However, I did not stop many seconds to observe the effect of my words.

It seemed to me certain I could succeed in gaining speech with the captain, regardless of the orders that no one should go aft, and I followed Simon on deck, feeling

that such time of suspense as had been caused by the Britishers would soon be at an end.

On the gun-deck we found the watch off duty, or a certain number of the men, crouching very close together in private converse, and this, to my mind, boded no good.

They ceased talking as Simon and I approached, which was additional proof that they had been plotting mischief.

Surely the gale, which appeared, judging from the ship's motions, to be increasing in force each instant, and the knowledge that we were in hot pursuit of an enemy, should have kept their thoughts from mutiny; but that which they had seen and heard was too mysterious and uncanny to be driven from their minds, whatever the counter attraction.

Simon and I literally clawed our way along, forced to keep a firm hold continually upon something, else the terrific upward bounds and downward plunges of the ship would have flung us headlong against the gun-carriages.

I had never before found it so difficult to keep my footing; never believed a huge ship could be tossed in such fashion by the wind and waves.

It seemed to me in the highest degree foolhardy to continue the chase under such circumstances, and I questioned if it had not already been abandoned.

"What sail are we under?" I asked of the man nearest, bawling the words in his ear because the uproar even down there between decks was so great that one was forced to shout in order to make himself heard.

“Carryin’ everything that can be jammed on her,” the sailor replied, with a growl of discontent. “The captain is bound to make good the words of the ghost, an’, accordin’ to the looks of things, I’d say the cruise is like to be ended in short order.”

CHAPTER VII.

A LIVELY SCRIMMAGE.

IT surely seemed as if the possibility of capturing the chase might have kept the men's thoughts, for a time at least, from those mysterious happenings which had sown the seeds of mutiny among us ; but yet such was not the case.

For my part, the gale which was buffeting the ship, because she dare show such a press of canvas that at times it appeared as if the fabric lay upon her beam ends, was enough to banish all thought of that which occurred and could not readily be explained.

Had the *America* been snugged down in proper condition to meet the furious blasts, the tempest might have howled yet louder without causing a single sensation of uneasiness or fear, because we knew full well that the good ship was fit to meet any ordinary tumult of nature.

But when, in the midst of what might almost be called a tempest, her captain had ordered that she be given as much canvas as could be carried, without literally burying her, then was the situation such as seemed to demand the attention of every one.

Had these mutinously inclined sailors cried out against

Captain Ropes's thus forcing the ship to her utmost point of endurance, then would there have been method in their madness.

Instead of this, however, they allowed their minds to dwell upon the past, shrinking before the imaginary evils, and apparently giving no heed to the imminent danger which threatened.

As these thoughts came into my mind, I stood clasping with both hands the stanchion, lest I be hurled like a shuttle-cock around the deck, lost in amazement because the men could be so keen in following their own superstitions, and so dull to present surroundings.

Simon, who had been following close at my heels, and was now swaying to and fro at my side as he clutched the same support, said, after we had surveyed the groups of mutinous sailormen :

"Let us try to go on deck. It may be that we shall succeed in having speech with my father, and it appears to me necessary he should know what we have learned."

Anything was preferable to remaining there, so I said to myself, although doubting if it would be possible for us to gain the spar-deck.

Waiting until the ship was comparatively steady for an instant, we forsook the stanchion to make a rush for the next nearest stationary object to which we could cling, and thus, by short stages, after no little expenditure of time, succeeded in gaining the hatch, which had been left open only sufficiently wide to admit of the passage of a man's body.

Here we stood on the ladder, with our heads just showing above the combing, witnessing such a terrifying spectacle as I had never before seen.

To describe the ship as she literally wallowed through the foaming waters, is beyond my power.

There were times when it appeared to me as if the gun-deck was two feet beneath the surface, and, in a twinkling, both of us lads were drenched to the skin, although, as I have said, only our heads and shoulders were exposed.

The labouring craft, carrying such a press of canvas as prevented her from rising to the waves, literally ploughed her way through them. The spars groaned as they buckled to the wind, until it appeared each instant as if they must go by the board. Now and then, when we were so far beneath the yawning chasms of water that the force of the gale was shut off from us momentarily, the slatting of chains and bolt-ropes made a din so great that it could not have been equalled by an army of blacksmiths hammering at their anvils.

A wilder or more awe-inspiring scene cannot be imagined, and to Simon and me, inexperienced as we were in a seafaring life, the peril appeared exceeding great.

Now and then, far in the distance, directly over the bow, could be seen the topsails of the chase, who must have been making as heavy weather of it as we were, and I said to myself that it was no longer a question of measuring strength between Britisher and Yankee, but simply a contest which would be decided in favour of the ship that had been most carefully and strongly constructed.

To pursue an enemy under such conditions seemed little less than madness; yet I afterward came to believe that Captain Ropes's recklessness, at such a time, was far more potent toward subduing the mutiny of the crew than any other course he might have pursued.

There was no need for us to discuss the question of trying to gain speech with the captain.

It would have been literally impossible for either of us to have made our way aft to the quarter-deck, even though no one stood ready to oppose us, and this Simon understood as well as I.

Clutching me by the arm to attract attention, for in such a place one might have bawled himself hoarse, without making his words heard twelve inches away, Simon motioned for me to descend, and with no little difficulty we made our way once more to the gun-deck.

Here, in a corner which was sheltered by one of the gun-carriages, we contrived to carry on a fragmentary conversation, during which it was agreed that the crew should not be told of what we had discovered regarding the prisoners until we could gain speech with the captain.

While the ship was labouring so violently, there was little danger that those in the brig would attempt any mischief, however favourable an opportunity presented itself, and we would be warranted in holding our peace, so long as both of us remained on the alert.

As a matter of course, under ordinary circumstances, we would not have hesitated to inform the men that one

of the Britishers had escaped, and this would have been clearly our duty ; but now, while they were in a state of mutiny, so to speak, it seemed advisable that we keep secret what had been learned.

It was impossible to pay a visit to the cook's quarters for the purpose of getting food, and we knew beyond peradventure that all hands must content themselves with bread and water until the gale had so far abated as to render work in the kitchen possible.

Although such a task was in the highest degree distasteful, we lads descended into the hold after having held this brief consultation, and there remained, much to the surprise of those sailors who were on guard.

Here the tumult, save as shown by the plunging and rolling of the ship, was comparatively slight, and we might have indulged in conversation without great exertion ; but neither of us felt inclined for words at such a time.

I fancied Simon Ropes was much in the same frame of mind as myself. It seemed as if death was close upon us, and that the next instant might seal our doom.

The Britishers were naturally eager to learn what was being done, and, thinking they would be more disposed to defer any plans of escape which might have been made, if the truth were known, I readily explained to them the situation as it had been presented to me.

After this was done, Simon and I, each holding a loaded musket, and on the alert for any noise which might proclaim the whereabouts of that man who had succeeded in getting out of the brig, sat with our backs against the

bulkhead, having in such position a full view of those who should be closely guarded.

Even now, as memory goes back, I am surprised that we lads were not wholly overcome by terror.

The ship staggering under canvas enough to bury her ; the tempest raging and howling, eager to destroy the handiwork of man ; the mutinous crew on the gun-deck plotting, perhaps, against their officers, and in the hold nineteen men ready to risk their lives in an effort to escape.

It was a series of perils which one would say must finally overwhelm us, and I saw but little hope in the future.

There is no reason why I should dwell at length upon all these terrors, for they menaced us until we lads were numb with despair.

During all that night the *America* staggered on, like some living thing pursued by the furies, and, meanwhile, Simon Ropes and I shared the duties of the guard, not daring to tell them that we knew of more danger in the work than they imagined.

At some time in the evening ship's biscuit and cold boiled pork had been served, for the cooks were unable to prepare even a pannikin of tea, and when morning came the situation remained unchanged.

One of the sailors who had stood guard with us attempted to make his way on deck, and came back reporting much the same state of affairs as when we had tried to gain speech with Captain Ropes.

The hours passed slowly ; breakfast was the same as the supper of the night previous, and we munched the dry

bread, washing it down with water from the scuttle-butt which had been lashed in the hold to supply the prisoners, while our bodies were bruised and sore from being flung about, despite all our efforts to remain in one position, when the motions of the ship were most violent.

As the forenoon wore on, I fancied that the ship laboured less heavily, and those of the sailors who remained in the hold with us predicted that the gale would have come to an end before sunset ; but none believed we might be able to come up with the chase.

Then it was that all of us were astounded by a call to quarters, and the bo'sun's mate who brought us the order announced that the hatch on the gun-deck leading to the hold was to be fixed in place with bars, in order that the prisoners' guard might be at liberty to take their proper stations with the remainder of the crew.

It seemed absolutely impossible that Captain Ropes could have it in mind to open an engagement under such conditions of the weather, and yet the order brought to us told plainly that we were come within range of the chase, and also that she was disposed to show fight rather than surrender peaceably.

The sailormen who were with us looked grave and disturbed as they prepared to obey the command, and we two lads were literally bewildered by mingled fear and astonishment.

However, the hatch was secured in place so firmly that, even though all the Britishers succeeded in getting out of the brig, they could not leave the hold.

When we stood on the gun-deck once more, quivering with fear at the thought of taking part in a battle, I, despite all my timorousness, did not fail to see all the details.

The ports had been opened, and through one or the other, from time to time, came great jets of water as the waves dashed against the ship, flooding the deck until our gunners stood knee-deep in the briny surge.

The hatchway leading to the magazine was guarded by two men, who held it in place as the seas came aboard, and stood ready to open it for the gunners' assistants whenever they were forced to descend for ammunition.

I question now, since having come to know more regarding such affairs, if sailormen ever took part in a queerer engagement than we were making ready for.

Fancy loading heavy guns when the powder must be held in the arms of the men lest it be rendered worthless by moisture! Think of two or three sailors holding their coats or strips of tarpaulin around the cartridge while it was being placed in the muzzle of the piece, to guard against a sudden inrush of the water! Picture to yourself the ship plunging, rising, rolling, and tossing about while the men made ready to shed the blood of their fellow creatures!

Now and then, as the fabric rose heavily upon the mountains of water, we could see to leeward, half a gun-shot distant, a ship which looked to be the very counterpart of our own, save that the cross of St. George was floating where we displayed the stars and stripes.

All show of mutiny had disappeared from the faces of the crew, so far as I could make out.

The strangeness of the situation had driven away all discontent, and once more was the *America* manned by big-hearted, whole-souled Yankee sailors.

During the drills which had been carried on regularly from the beginning of the cruise, Simon and I came to know that our stations in time of an engagement were at Master Joshua's gun, and although it was not possible lads like us could be of any assistance in carrying ammunition while the ship was plunging so violently, we went to our posts as if counting on rendering all necessary service.

"Yonder is a prize well worth the taking, lads," Master Josh shouted as we approached, and it was easy for us to understand that he had in mind something different from omens and signs of danger. "She's every inch as good a sailer as the *America*, and but for the carrying away of her topmast, we never should have overhauled her."

"She must be an armed vessel, else we would not have been called to quarters," I ventured to say, speaking like a simple, for such a statement under the circumstances was needless.

"Ay, lad, but carrying less metal than do we."

"In such case I should think it would be wiser for her to surrender than fight," Simon added.

I knew by my own heart that he was wishing such might be the case, for an engagement at any time was by no means to our liking, and while the gale raged so furiously it seemed doubly terrible.

“She’s reckonin’ on cripplin’ us by some lucky shot, and thereby makin’ her escape. Marksmanship won’t count for a great deal in this weather, and it’ll be more by accident than good wit if a single ball hits its target.”

“Are Simon and I to bring up ammunition?” I asked, yet knowing full well we could not accomplish the task.

“We’ll leave that for some of the other sailormen this time, lad. You wouldn’t get one charge in a dozen up here without wetting it. It’ll be a case of firing whenever there’s a chance, which won’t be often, accordin’ to my way of thinkin’, an’ we can afford to take our time about it.”

Men were stationed from the ladder of the after-hatchway to the quarter-deck, not more than two feet apart, that the captain’s commands might pass from one to the other, and those on deck were clinging to life-lines, so I was told, lest they be washed overboard by the angry waters.

“Fire as often as you can reload, and strive to cripple her spars rather than the hull!” came the word, whereupon the engagement was opened by Master Josh himself.

It was only with difficulty we could hear the report of the gun above the roar of the tempest; but while the ship was rising on a towering wave we were able to watch the flight of the missile.

It overshot its mark, and the old gunner gave vent to an exclamation of anger.

Then I saw a cloud of smoke emerge from one of the Britisher’s ports, and almost immediately it was dispersed by the rising wind.

She also had opened fire, and, like us, her first shot was a vain one.

This engagement was not like unto any I ever dreamed of, and when half an hour had passed neither ship was the worse for it, so far as could be seen.

Both craft held their course, neither sailing faster nor slower than the other, but moving onward at the same relative distance, as if we were engaged in a friendly race.

The fact that none of the Britisher's shots had come aboard gave me courage, and I almost brought myself to believe that they would not be able to hit us.

Not being forced to perform any duties, Simon and I acted as spectators of this odd battle, and were speculating upon the chances that our gunners might succeed in shooting away one of the enemy's spars, when suddenly there was a hideous crashing of the timbers, cries of pain at the gun nearest to us but one, and for the first time I saw the white deck crimsoned with the blood of my countrymen.

Fortune had favoured the Britisher so far, at least, and now fear took possession of me.

The lifeless bodies of two men, and one of them he with whom I had been speaking five minutes before, were rolled to and fro on the deck as the ship leaped and plunged, while another was being helped to the cockpit by comrades, that his wounds might be dressed.

From that moment I failed to realise all that took place. After the first flush of cowardice, a fever took possession of me.

I prayed fervently that our next shot might work more injury than theirs had done; the thirst for blood was full upon me, and I saw everywhere before my eyes that ominous crimson hue.

For how long a time this singular battle was waged I knew not; but afterward came to learn that no less than two hours elapsed, from the time Carleton and Hawley had been killed, before the Britisher hauled down the cross of St. George.

Three times had the *America's* hull been struck, and our gunners declared that we had sent home no less than ten shot, one of which wounded the enemy's mizzenmast, within six feet of the deck, so badly that it fell ten minutes later, while another carried away all the spars above the mainmasthead.

During this time the wind had lulled until it was no more than a full sailing breeze, but the sea was yet running mountains high.

No blood had been spilled aboard our craft after the first successful shot, and even while the engagement was on had the sailors cared for the bodies of their two dead messmates.

Well, the prize was ours, providing we could board her, and I came out of the fever of excitement nervous and trembling, as if having lived four and twenty hours under the very shadow of the death angel's wings.

The *America* was hove to, for it would be useless to think of boarding the stranger while the sea was so high, and until the next morning we lay close by the prize.

Meanwhile, Simon and I, aided by two of the sailors, kept watch over the prisoners.

During all this time we had had no opportunity to speak with the captain, and, in fact, made no especial effort to do so.

The chance would come later without our seeming to court it, and meanwhile four armed men should be able to prevent that single Britisher, who lurked somewhere in the hold, from doing us a mischief.

The prisoners remained in the brig, apparently unable to escape from such close quarters, and, despite all our efforts, neither my comrade nor I could discover in what way one of them had gotten free.

The capture of the ship was a godsend to us at that time, for, with such a prize before them, the men who had been on the verge of mutiny could not well insist that the omens had been for evil, and it was, during this night at least, as if they had forgotten all the disagreeable and mysterious events.

At daybreak next morning, Simon and I, having taken turns at sleeping during the night, went on deck. Before us, not more than two miles away, lay the captured ship.

The sea was yet boisterous, but not to such an extent as would prevent our taking possession of the stranger, and already were the boats afloat.

We came soon to learn that our prize was the *Ralph Nickerson*, of and for London from Quebec, laden with lumber, and carrying eight guns with a strong crew.

Her burthen was full twenty tons more than ours, and a finer craft could not be found outside the United States.

"If it so be that we succeed in carryin' her to port, there's fifty or sixty thousand dollars' worth of prize-money, my boys!" one of the men said to his companions, as a group of old shellbacks stood amidships watching our boats pulling toward the Britisher. "Sixty thousand dollars added to what we've already taken won't be small pickin's for any of us."

"We'll hope to have more of the same kind of omens," Mr. Fernald, who chanced to pass in time to hear the remark, cried, cheerily. "You who have been persuading yourselves that we were bound straight for Davy Jones's locker must feel rather small this morning. The cruise isn't ended yet, and we'll put that ship into Salem, or I'm a Dutchman!"

"That's all very well, sir," one of the older men replied; "but what about the ghost that can talk?"

"It strikes me that he's a liar," Mr. Fernald said, laughingly. "Or else he's out of his latitude when he attempts to predict for sailormen. Suppose we had heeded whatever it was that tried to frighten us, and put about for home? It would have been the same as throwin' away fifty thousand good dollars."

The majority of the sailors on deck began to look foolish, realising how groundless had been their fears, and it was left for Joshua Seabury to revive the superstitions which had been temporarily driven away by the smell of burning powder.

"We are not out of the woods yet," he cried. "No one can say with certainty that we'll carry yonder ship into port, and who knows how soon we'll be layin' under the lee of a British frigate, waiting for them to board us?"

"You should hide your head in shame, Joshua Seabury!" Mr. Fernald said, angrily. "A man like you, counted as being the best gunner on the Massachusetts coast, one who fought with credit at Tripoli, to give way like a baby because some one of your messmates played a foolish trick!"

Having said this, the officer turned on his heel, as if regretting that he had stopped to bandy words with the men, and went aft, Simon and I following with the hope that we might find an opportunity of speaking to Captain Ropes.

He was standing near the wheel, glass in hand, watching the movements of the boats, and no one checked us as we went toward him.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHEERING INFORMATION.

WHEN we came near the captain both us lads halted, and neither dared make any effort at attracting his attention, save we might do so by silence.

We stood two or three feet away, much like culprits who had come to beg for pardon, and there waited until the commander of the *America* chanced to take the glass from his eyes.

Seeing us quite by accident, as it were, he looked wondrously surprised, as if it were difficult for him to realise that we could have so far transgressed sea customs as to venture unbidden on the quarter-deck.

Although Captain Joseph Ropes should have been the one to show respect when he and I met, because of the fact that he was my uncle's employee, and I was a step above him in station when we were ashore, I dared not open my mouth, while he gazed at me curiously, with an expression of severe disapproval upon his face.

But for the fact that Simon was with me, and succeeded in plucking up heart at that moment, the interview which we had been waiting for so long would have come to naught, owing to my being tongue-tied.

My comrade, however, rendered desperate, as he afterward told me, by the thought that we might be forced to go forward again without having communicated our secret, stepped close by his father's side, and said, in a low, yet emphatic tone :

“Nathan and I have discovered that which we believe you should know at once, sir.”

Captain Ropes glanced around quickly to learn if any other might have overheard his son's words, and then said, in a low tone :

“Tell me quickly what you have learned, and do it in such manner that no one may suspect we are holding private converse.”

“There are but eighteen prisoners in the brig, sir, and yet by Nathan Crowninshield's reckoning, as well as my own, there should be nineteen.”

“Nineteen were sent below,” the captain said, after a brief pause, during which I fancied he was running over in his mind the number of Britishers taken.

“There are but eighteen now, sir.”

“Are you two lads the only ones aboard ship who know that one of the men is missing?”

“So it would seem, sir. The cooks send nineteen pannikins when meals are served, and one of the prisoners comes forward twice for rations, in order to hide the absence of his companion.”

“So! And that's the ghost, eh? You lads have done me a service which shall be rewarded later. Have you spoken with any of the crew on the subject?”

"No, sir; we thought it best to come first to you, and should have done so yesterday, had it been possible to get aft."

"You have acted wisely; continue to hold your peace, and share guard duty with the sailors in order that he who has gained his liberty may not do a mischief. When the proper time comes, we'll have a search for the missing man. Go forward now, and remember that this matter is not to be mentioned to the men."

I was more than a little disappointed with the result of the interview, as Simon and I, obeying the captain's command, took up our proper stations once more.

There had been in my mind the idea that some startling change would be the result of our communication, and yet I fancied Captain Ropes looked upon the matter as of but little importance, even though he declared we had rendered important service.

We lads might have conversed at greater length with the commander of the ship and yet failed of attracting the attention of our messmates, so intent were all upon watching the *America's* boats as they neared the prize.

Taking possession of the *Ralph Nickerson* did not vary from previous work of this kind.

The commander of the ship, having surrendered when he hauled down his flag, received our men with due submission, and when the boats returned they brought with them thirty-three sailors, the first officer, and the captain, as prisoners.

The sea yet ran high, and it was no slight task to get

the Britishers aboard safely, for many of them were so disgruntled and stubborn over being captured as to take the chances of being drowned rather than help themselves in the slightest degree.

John Proctor, our fourth mate, and eleven men were sent on board the *Ralph Nickerson* as a prize-crew, and such of the enemy's men as had been left in their own craft already were agreed, in consideration of being set at liberty when port was made, to aid in working the ship.

No more than three hours were thus spent before the captured vessel was under way, steering westward, and the *America* laid on such a course as it was believed would bring her in the track of the enemy's merchantmen.

The wounds which the prize had received during the engagement would be attended to on her passage to the United States. While all the injuries might have been speedily repaired had we laid alongside of her so that our crew could aid in the work, Captain Ropes did not consider it wise to remain near at hand, lest a British cruiser should heave in sight, and, on seeing the two ships hove to, understand all that had occurred.

Now that my mind was set at rest concerning what the seamen believed had been a ghostly visitor, I found new cause for alarm.

First, however, let me set down the conclusion which Simon and I arrived at concerning that which had so alarmed our crew.

The fact that one of the prisoners was missing from the

brig seemed to us — and from the expression on Captain Ropes's face I fancied he looked at the matter much the same as we did — conclusive proof that he who was at liberty had played the part of ghost, although how it might have been contrived we did not attempt to explain.

Of course we knew full well that there were no such things as spirits, even though we had been seriously alarmed, and it was not necessary we should reason out the entire scheme in order to say with good certainty that it had been brought about by the Britisher who should at this moment have been in the brig.

It was to me as if the visit of the supposed ghost had never occurred, the new danger being so imminent as to drive all else from my mind.

This peril lay, so I believed, in the number of prisoners we had on board.

There were, or should be, fifty-two in the hold, and three aft. Our crew, which numbered, when we left port, one hundred and sixty-three all told, had been weakened considerably by the prize-crews thrown aboard the captured craft.

Twelve men in all were sent to the *Ralph Nickerson*, eight took charge of the *Benjamin*, and seven were sent into the *James and Charlotte*, making twenty-seven in all.

This reduced our number to one hundred and thirty-six, and although such a force should overwhelm fifty-five Britishers if they took it into their heads to rise, the enemy was sufficiently strong, more particularly if our people were taken by surprise, to cause serious trouble.

While thus casting about to find food for anxiety, I took well into account the fact that, should the prisoners succeed in releasing themselves, they would fight desperately, and not be blamed for so doing, since they could only look forward to imprisonment when we made the home port.

And they had good cause for venturing their lives in the effort to escape, if they knew how their countrymen treated such of the Americans as were captured, because they might reasonably conclude that we of the United States would be equally brutal with those who fell into our hands.

It must not be supposed that I remained idle in order to cast up all these accounts which might work to our disadvantage.

I have simply set down here that which came into my mind like flashes of light, as Simon Ropes and I walked forward to obey his father's command.

As the captain had left the matter, we were responsible in a certain degree for the prisoners, and both of us were bent on showing, if possible, that we could be depended upon even for such a difficult task as this.

We went directly into the hold, and there found as lively a scene of confusion and tumult as can well be imagined.

The Britishers whom we had taken from the other prizes were noisily greeting the newcomers, and eagerly questioning them concerning the news of the world from a British standpoint.

The brig was so full as to make it appear that the men were packed like herrings in a box, and I wondered how it might be possible for them to lie down at night without being stowed two or three deep over the floor of the prison.

"How may it be possible to take so many out for exercise?" Simon asked, in dismay, and I understood from the question that there was in his mind somewhat of that which had been troubling me.

"They can go out in squads, I reckon, for it is not likely the captain would allow all these on deck at the same time. However, that need give us little concern, for it is our business to see that he who runs at liberty somewhere in the hold be prevented from doing a mischief."

"I cannot understand why matters are allowed to remain in this condition," Simon said, as if speaking to himself. "It would have been more seemly, according to my way of thinking, had an immediate search been made for the Britisher who has succeeded in getting out of the brig. While he is at liberty much mischief may be done, however well we perform our duty."

"It appears that your father is not of the same mind, and we can set it down as a fact that he knows best what should be done."

"But think of the chances for trouble, while one of the Britishers is free to move about the hold as he chooses!"

It was as if Simon's fears gave me courage, for I replied, stoutly, as one might who never knew what it was to be timorous :

"We have no right to question the captain's wisdom, and should think only of carrying out his wishes to the letter."

Simon made no reply, for a lad cannot well grumble against his father's commands, and we loitered around as if from no other motive than that of curiosity, while the prisoners were making a tumult with their greetings and questionings.

Before the day was come to an end Simon suggested to me that we take it upon ourselves to find the man who had escaped.

Since the last batch of prisoners had arrived the guard was strengthened, and now, as I understood from Mr. Fernald, no less than three of the crew would be on duty constantly, even during an engagement, therefore might Simon and I make search for this solitary Britisher if it so pleased us.

But I was not minded to act upon his suggestion, believing Captain Ropes would have ordered an immediate search, unless it was his purpose to so conduct the matter that the *America's* crew should understand beyond a peradventure who had played the part of ghost.

If we two lads took the matter in our own hands, we might upset the commander's plans most seriously.

Therefore it was that we hung about the brig, regardless of the fact that the men detailed as guard expressed no little surprise because of our willingness to remain below while we might be on deck; and one day after another passed, while the *America* cruised to and fro in

the track of merchantmen, as if her commander had forgotten equally his son and those whom the latter had been set to watch.

Each day the prisoners were taken on deck, twelve or fourteen at a time, and the fellow who had succeeded in freeing himself from the brig must have come to the conclusion that his was an unwise move, since he had thus deprived himself of the privilege of fresh air.

We were seldom on the gun-deck, Simon and I, and therefore had little idea of how our men were behaving, save as we overheard the conversation between the sailors on duty in the hold.

Through this slight source of information we gathered that the majority of the crew were quite willing to forget their previous belief in the ghostly visitor; but the elder men, among them Master Josh, held to the idea as strongly as if their happiness depended upon its being proven a fact.

Our success had lessened the fears of the superstitious, and none of the men had overmuch to say concerning the significance of our carrying away a spar on the first Friday after leaving port.

That portion of our troubles had been cast aside once and for all, as a lying omen.

Each morning I expected that Simon and I would be summoned aft by the captain, and each day was I grievously disappointed in my expectations.

The prisoners, now so formidable in number, knowing that there was one on the outside who, at the first favour-

able opportunity, would aid them, grew insolent, jeering at the guard until it seemed positive our men would so far forget themselves as to raise their hands against apparently helpless captives.

Then came that morning when, judging from the confident bearing and outspoken threats of the Britishers, I made certain they were prepared to strike a blow of some kind, and I had called Simon Ropes aside with the intention of suggesting to him that we go aft once more to tell his father how much mischief was brewing, when we heard a great commotion on deck.

The guard, who had been ordered not to leave their posts of duty under any circumstances, except by express orders, urged that we lads ascertain what had caused the seeming disturbance.

I was the more willing to comply with such request because in the performance we might get an opportunity of speaking privately to Simon's father, and with all speed the lad and I went on to the spar-deck, finding there both watches in the highest state of excitement, as well they might be, for off to leeward, not more than four or five miles away, could be seen a full-rigged ship.

"Is she a Britisher?" I asked of the man nearest me, and he replied, confidently:

"Ay, lad, there's no mistaking her build and rigging. She hails from England, or I'm a Dutchman, and so heavily loaded with whatsoever may be the cargo that we'll find in her a prize worth taking."

"Providing her captain isn't in a condition to object,"

I replied, with a smile, whereat the man said, cheerily, as if he found in the fact no little pleasure :

“ She’s armed, lad, so I’ve heard the officers say, an’ shows six ports on a side, therefore it stands to reason she carries no less than twelve guns.”

“ And probably can put up as severe a fight as did the *Nickerson*,” Simon added, grimly.

“ Well, I am allowin’ we need exercise of that kind, lad. What with omens, an’ ghosts, an’ near to downright mutiny, this ’ere crew is gettin’ so rusty that a little blood-lettin’ will work to their advantage. I hold to it a privateersman gets into a bad condition if he ain’t knocked around just about so much, an’ our prizes thus far have come too easy. If we could suddenly find ourselves within range of a British sloop-of-war it would do us a world of good.”

“ I’m thinkin’ you’d change your song if anything like that should happen,” Simon said, with a laugh, whereat the sailor, who was an exceeding sensible man, gave us a long lecture upon the necessity of running a privateersman into serious danger now and then for the sake of holding him in proper discipline.

Well, it was destined that we should not receive any very painful lesson on this day, despite the fact that the stranger was reasonably well armed.

Before two hours had passed we threw a shot across the Britisher’s bow, and sent another into her mizzen rigging which did no little damage.

Then her captain showed that he must have had more



“WHAT A CHEER WENT UP FROM OUR MEN.”

milk than blood in his veins, for without discharging a single piece, — and we were now come so near as to see that she did indeed carry twelve guns, — he hove to quietly as any lamb.

Some of our people fancied there was a trick in all this ; that when we came to board her we would find ourselves in hot water ; but Captain Ropes was not the man to take any chances of this kind.

The *America* hauled around under the stranger's stern, where she could rake her fore and aft with a broadside, and then the boats were lowered away, — four of them, under command of Mr. Fernald.

It was the quietest capture one can imagine.

The Britisher did not make even a protest as our people swarmed over the rail, and when Mr. Fernald returned, leaving on board twenty men to hold possession, we knew that we had as a prize the British twelve-gun ship *Hope*, from St. Thomas for Glasgow, with a cargo of sugar, rum, and cotton.

What a cheer went up from our men when Captain Ropes, after a brief conversation with the first officer, stepped forward to the break of the quarter-deck and announced the fact in much the same words I have just set down !

The men yelled themselves hoarse, for this ship would prove by all odds the most valuable prize we had taken, and if the *America* turned about on the home run now, without adding further to her captures, we had indeed made a most successful cruise of what at one time threatened to end in disaster.

But good fortune was not to desert us with the capture of the *Hope*, for Mr. Fernald had brought with him such news as caused the blood of every member of the crew, including Simon and me, to tingle, and thus did the captain impart it to his men :

“ You lads who have been arguin’ an’ speechifyin’ ever since we left port, tryin’ to prove that the *America* was doomed because a rotten spar chanced to carry away on a Friday, have thus far been disappointed in all your doleful predictions. Not even the appearance of your so-called ghost, and that sepulchral voice which you claimed to have heard, could spoil our luck. We have already made a paying cruise of it, such a one as will tassel well our neckerchiefs with dollars, and yet there is more to come. Mr. Fernald brings the information, gathered from the master of the prize, that yonder ship left St. Thomas three days ago, one of a fleet of forty-five merchantmen under convoy of the sloops-of-war *Ring-dove* and *Scorpion*. We are in the vicinity of that rich fleet, my lads, and if we fail to pick up two or three good prizes out of it, it will be only through our own neglect.”

Then the men fell to shouting once more, jumping and dancing around the deck like a pack of savages, and one of them cried out, in a tone so loud that it could be heard distinctly by all hands :

“ Three cheers for the bloomin’ ghost what has brought us into such luck ! ”

The men laughed, and then cheered until the Britishers

on board the *Hope* must have believed we had entirely lost our heads over their capture.

When the excitement had died away somewhat, Captain Ropes, still facing us near the break of the quarter, said :

“ I allow, my lads, that we are a fairly good match for any British sloop-of-war afloat, and while I’m not hankerin’ for a fight which would bring in no dollars on the tail of it, we can afford to take the chances of meeting one of the king’s vessels while we pick up a stray merchantman. We’ll get rid of this prize as soon as may be, an’ then turn our attention to what should, within the next eight an’ forty hours, put us in fair shape to swing the *America’s* nose toward home. Bo’sun Valpey will choose twelve men as a prize-crew, an’ take charge of the *Hope*, making for the nearest port north of New York. Stir yourselves lively, my boys, for there’s no time to be lost ! ”

I question if at that moment a single member of the crew, not excepting Master Joshua, remembered any of the alleged omens which had seemingly threatened disaster to us all.

Every man Jack of them fluttered about with a will, and before another hour was passed a prize-crew had been thrown aboard the captured ship. We had thirty-one additional prisoners in the hold, making eighty-three in all, and the *Hope* was crowding on all sail with her nose pointing northward.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OUTBREAK.

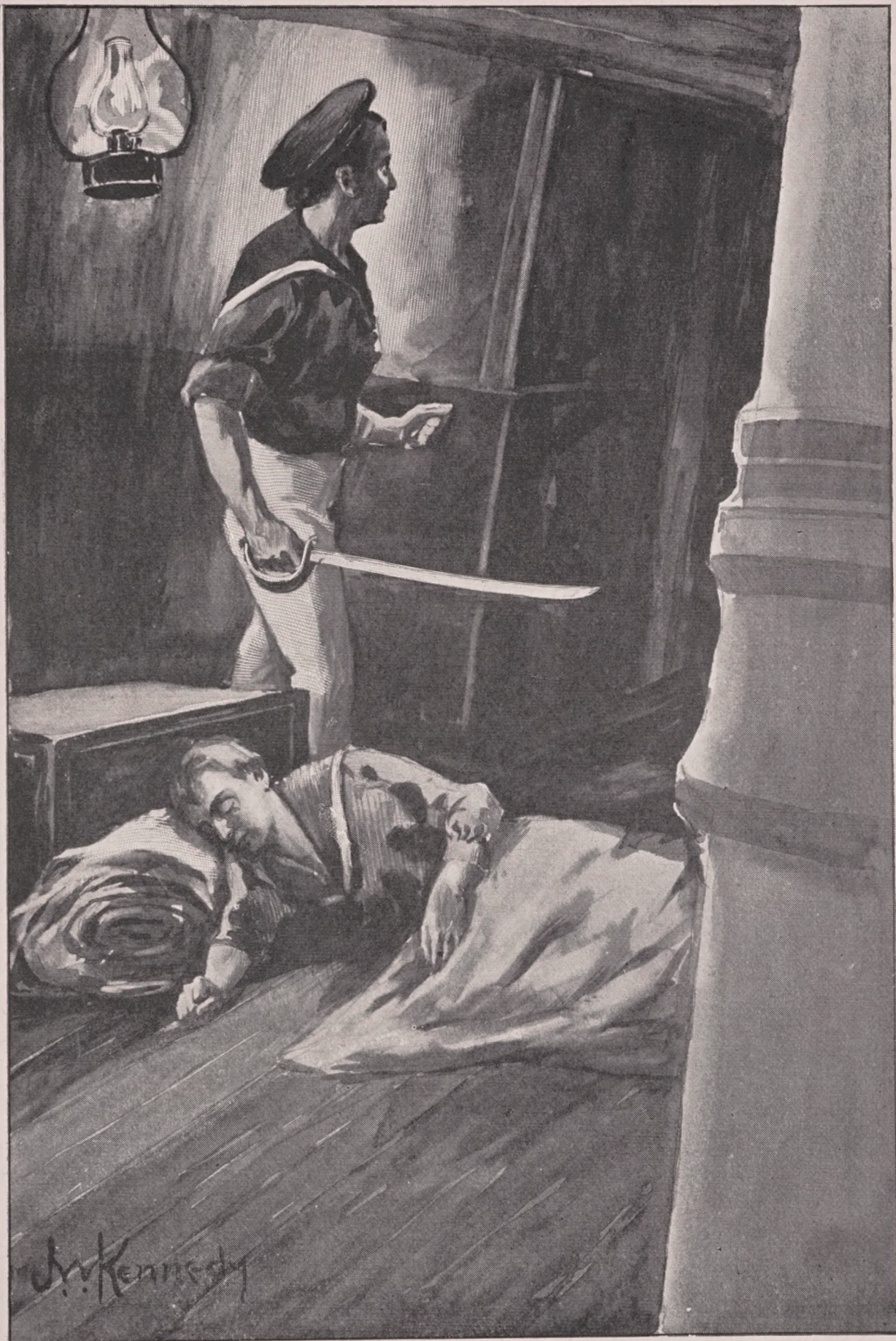
WHEN we parted company with the *Hope* there was among the crew of the *America* but one thought, one idea, and that the capture of other craft belonging to the *St. Thomas* fleet.

The richly laden ship had but whetted the appetite of the men for more, and some of the most sanguine believed we might remain in the midst of the fleet, seizing a vessel here and there, until we no longer had men enough on board to make up a prize-crew.

That we would succeed in capturing one or more other craft out of all the number that had left port seemed absolutely certain, even though the convoying sloops-of-war came across us while we were at our work, for, as Captain Ropes had said, we could make it exceeding lively for either the *Ringdove* or the *Scorpion*.

The men were so busily occupied with figuring up the amount of prize-money which had been, and was to be, earned, that they had no time to spend on possible ghosts, omens of any kind, or such happenings as had nearly converted honest Yankee sailors into mutineers.

It seemed to Simon and me that the danger from this



"WE DIVIDED OURSELVES INTO TWO WATCHES."

source had disappeared entirely ; but we were so seriously disturbed as to be wofully frightened over what might happen if the prisoners concluded to make an effort toward capturing the ship.

We speculated long and in vain trying to decide why the captain should have thus neglected to take some steps toward recapturing the Britisher who was lurking in the *America's* hold awaiting an opportunity to free his fellow.

Now we were positive this fellow had played the ghost by appearing in the fore-hatchway, as well as by shouting his senseless warning ; but how he had contrived to bring himself into view, when the night was so dark that the lookouts could not distinguish objects at a distance of two yards, was more than we could conjecture.

Simon and I had remained constantly on watch from the moment we discovered one of the prisoners to be missing, and since our having warned the captain not less than three of the sailors were also on duty in the hold.

At no time did both of us lads sleep during the same moment. We divided ourselves into two watches, and indulged in naps lasting no more than an hour.

Since we could thus rest as well in the daytime as at night, neither of us felt any evil effects from remaining constantly on the alert.

Never once during all this time did we either hear or see the prisoner who remained hidden somewhere in the hold, nor could we make certain, now that there were so many captives, whether those in the brig got more food than sufficed for their number.

It was only reasonable to believe, however, that the Britishers found ample opportunity to feed their comrade from the allowance dealt out, and also that he was ready to open an attack whenever the proper time had come.

On this day after we parted company with the *Hope*, praying that the prize-crew might succeed in taking her to an American port, where she could be sold for our benefit, it seemed necessary we two lads should exercise more vigilance than ever before, because the excitement among our crew was so great that those detailed for duty as prisoners' guard gave heed to what was going on above, rather than to watching the throng of enemies which was so rapidly increasing in size.

The brig was no longer large enough to admit of all lying down to sleep at the same time, and it was certain some different arrangement must be made when night came.

Once we should be forced to give certain of the number free run of the hold, the danger to ourselves would be vastly increased, so Simon and I argued.

Because of the fact that we were in the immediate vicinity of a large fleet, some sail of which we hoped to capture, word had been passed to the effect that the prisoners would not be allowed to come on deck for exercise until further orders, and when this was made known to the Britishers they became so bold as to indulge in open threats of what they were able to do.

Some of the most reckless declared they could leave the brig at will, and that the *America* would be their prize in due course of time.

Simon and I discussed the advisability of going again to the captain, and would have done so but for fear of being laughed at as cowards who were afraid of unarmed and imprisoned men.

It was hardly probable Captain Ropes had forgotten the report we made, and it seemed certain he would take some steps to shun the danger when, in his opinion, the time was ripe for such a move.

As I have already said, the excitement among our crew was so great that it seemed impossible for those detailed as guard to remain below; but one or the other of the three men was constantly running on deck to learn if a sail had hove in sight.

Thus it was we came to know that, about an hour before sunset, the lookout had sighted a heavily laden brig, and the *America* was put about in full chase.

Perhaps because of this fact no attempt was made to provide better accommodations for the prisoners.

They were forced to remain packed in the prison, many of them unable to lie down, and their threats and insubordination increased to an alarming degree.

"We shall have trouble before morning," Simon said, in a tone of studied carelessness to one of the sentinels, hoping thereby to put the man more on his guard; but the latter replied, indifferently:

"Don't get fancies into your head, lad. Them 'ere Britishers are where they can't work any mischief, no matter how ripe they may be for it. When you've seen as many prisoners aboard ship as have come my way, you

won't bother yourself about what is possible for them to do while they're unarmed an' packed in snug as those fellows are."

Fortunately, my comrade and I had not become so familiar with privateering as to render us careless, else the good ship *America* would never have sailed into a Yankee port with the stars and stripes flying, and this much Captain Ropes has said time and time again.

Although we knew our muskets were in proper condition, Simon insisted they be discharged and reloaded, in order that we might be certain they were in working order, and he took both weapons on deck, where, after having received permission from Mr. Fernald, he emptied them.

When he returned, and while we were charging the weapons, the lad told me that the brig was yet in sight to the southward, and we stood every chance of overhauling her unless the wind should fail.

Just at that time, however, we gave very little heed to the possibility of another capture.

In the hold of the *America* we were confronted by such a situation as taxed our courage to the utmost.

While it was yet daylight we tried to sleep; but in vain, and after supper had been served we sat against the bulkhead, where none could come upon us from the rear, watching closely the snugly packed throng of Britishers as cats watch a lot of rats.

With all our precautions, the decisive moment came when we were least expecting it.

It was about ten o'clock at night. Two of the guard were on deck, having been drawn there by news that the chase was being rapidly overhauled, when I saw a man suddenly spring out of what had appeared to be a solid stanchion, as it looked to me, and before I had time to raise a cry the door of the brig was thrown open, the prisoners pouring out like swarming bees.

The sailor, who should have been on the alert, was standing near the foot of the ladder, waiting to learn from his two comrades who had gone on deck as to the chances of our coming up with the chase, and not until I cried out did he realise his danger.

By that time, the Britishers were upon him, and he went down like a man of straw, apparently trampled under their feet, as the foremost made a rush for the gun-deck, knowing full well that there would be found arms in plenty.

As a rule, I am a coward; but at that moment, my hand never so much as quivered, while I took careful aim at the leader, and he fell off the ladder at the same instant the report of my musket rang out, knocking down those who were immediately below him.

In a twinkling the entire mob had turned on us lads. They came as does a foaming wave, seeking to engulf whosoever shall have lingered on the sands, and involuntarily I closed my eyes while raising the musket like a club, in order to shut out that blow which seemingly would deprive me of life.

Fortunately, Simon's musket was loaded, and he dropped

the foremost in his tracks while the infuriated men were a dozen paces distant, thereby checking the advance ever so slightly, and in that brief interval I gathered my senses once more.

It seemed certain I would be killed, and with this belief came such courage as I had never believed could be mine.

Swinging the musket above my head, I rushed straight toward the pale-faced man I had seen apparently coming out of the solid stanchion, and not until I had taken two or three paces toward him did he show his weapon.

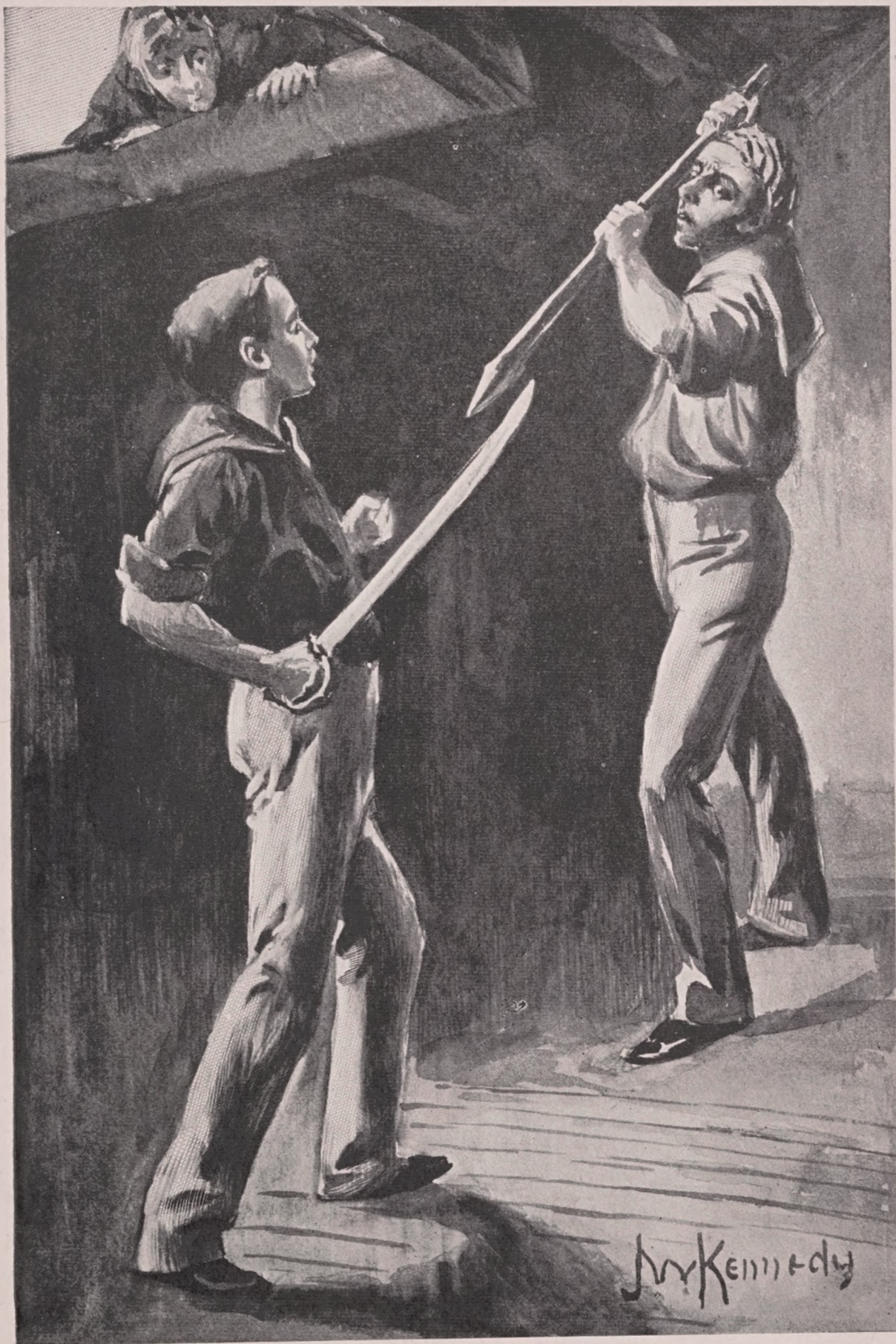
He — and it could be none other than the man who had played the part of ghost — had possessed himself of a boarding-pike, and I understood from the gleam in his eyes that he counted on running me through.

I brought down the musket with a force that would have floored him like an ox; but he was prepared for such an attack, and my weapon was splintered on the deck timbers, leaving me with arms so numb that, even though my life depended upon the movement, I could not raise such fragments as my hands still clutched.

In another instant the boarding-pike would have found its way through my body, and then, as if the blow had been delivered over my shoulder, I saw the butt of a musket fall full upon the fellow's head, crushing him to the deck.

Some of the men who were loitering on the gun-deck have declared I yelled like a maniac for help; but of that I have no knowledge.

When the battle was over, — and it proved to be such a



"IN ANOTHER INSTANT THE BOARDING PIKE WOULD HAVE FOUND ITS WAY THROUGH MY BODY."

battle as I hope never to take part in again, — I was not conscious of having uttered the slightest cry from the moment when the prisoners swarmed out of the brig.

I only know that I struck again and again with the barrel of the musket, which was all of the weapon remaining in my hands, and before me it seemed as if hundreds upon hundreds of infuriated Britishers were pressing forward, intent only on delivering a fatal blow.

What has been set down above is not quite true, for I remember that Simon Ropes stood by my side, fighting manfully, and doing twice the execution that was within my power, for his weapon was uninjured, and the butt of it fell on more than one man's head, crushing it to a pulp, or seeming to do so.

It is said that we were in the hold keeping back the desperate Britishers no more than three minutes, but it seemed to me as if a full hour passed before I saw dimly a file of sailors, armed with muskets and cutlasses, descending the ladder, shooting with careful aim as they came.

Then it was as if a veil fell suddenly over my eyes; sparks of seeming fire danced beneath my eyelids, and I knew no more.

When consciousness returned I was in the cockpit being attended to by the surgeon, and Simon Ropes, bandaged and wrapped in white cloth until only a comrade would recognise him, lay still as death.

"Is he dead?" I managed to ask, although the simple act of moving my tongue caused pain.

"Not a bit of it, lad. Both he and you will live many a long day yet, unless it so chances that you foolishly stand in the path of a British ball when it comes aboard," the stern-visaged yet kindly doctor said, in a cheery tone. "You two lads are rather the worse for wear, I'll admit; but you've proven yourselves men on this night, and, what's more, have saved the *America*. But for you I doubt not that all hands of us would now be dead, or in the brig with our late prisoners as guards over us."

"Did we indeed do as much, sir?" I asked, despite the pain, for the words sounded very sweet in my ears.

"It is a fact, and Captain Ropes himself said as much not ten minutes ago. What is more, the ghost has been discovered."

"Ay, sir, Simon and I have known without seeing him, these ten days past; but how was he discovered?"

"Joshua Seabury came upon his hiding-place quite by accident, after the scrimmage was over, and the Britishers packed in the brig once more. There, also, was found that with which he clothed himself when the men saw the form so plainly although the night was dark."

"What was it, sir?" I cried, eagerly, trying to rise on my elbow, but falling back with a groan immediately afterward.

"Neither more nor less than a piece of white bunting, beneath which he admits having carried a lantern found on the gun-deck while all hands were above. The light shining through the thin fabric disclosed his form, and yet was sufficiently thick to hide the shape of the flame."

“Do all the crew know this, sir?”

“You may be sure they do. Captain Ropes took good care it should be no secret, and there’s not a man aboard who is not ashamed to admit he ever believed in a ghost.”

When this brief conversation had come to an end I was assailed by a sensation of faintness which overpowered me, and could only close my eyes in utter helplessness.

Simon Ropes and I were yet in the cockpit when the *America* captured her fifth prize, the British brig *Dart*, laden with rum and cotton, and carrying eight guns.

While we lay below unable to move, the enemy had been overhauled, submitting without attempting to strike a blow, and we were the richer by just so much prize-money in prospect.

Although not a gun had been fired, two of the prisoners lost their lives.

It seems, as we heard later from Master Joshua, that our third officer, Mr. Sparhawk, together with Thomas Fuller, a boatswain’s mate, had been among those sent to board the prize. On returning to the *America* in order to make a report, they brought with them five prisoners; their boat was stove under the *America*’s counter, and two of the Britishers were drowned.

Anthony Caulfield, an able seaman who understood navigation, was put in charge of the prize, together with eight of our men. And twenty prisoners were added to the number in the hold.

The *Dart* was headed for Salem without delay, and our

ship cruised back and forth, hoping to sight yet other vessels of the fleet.

Simon and I were not seriously wounded. The prisoners had had no weapons, therefore our only injuries came from blows with bare fists, save the one on my head which was caused by the barrel of my own musket, that had been wrested from my grasp.

Within eight and forty hours we were able to go on deck, and then, to our great surprise, we learned that the *America* was steering a course which would speedily bring her into Salem Harbour.

It had been necessary to part with so many of the crew in order to man the prizes, that we were short-handed, and there was nothing left for us save to make the home port as soon as possible, that we might take on board those who had probably arrived there in advance of us.

Captain Ropes ordered us lads into his cabin immediately we made our appearance on the spar-deck in company with the surgeon, and, once there, he spoke such words of praise as cause my ears to tingle even at this late day.

He appeared to believe that we had indeed saved the ship from being captured by the prisoners, and declared that when the prize-money was distributed our shares should be the same as those of the gunners.

There were many other promises given by him voluntarily; but I do not propose to set them down here, for they were all made good when we sailed aboard the *America* on her second cruise, and that yarn shall be spun

at some future time if I decide to put in writing, for the pleasure of Simon Ropes and myself, all which befell us then.

It is enough now if I say it was the captain's orders that we two lads live aft during the homeward voyage, and right well did we enjoy ourselves when our wounds were so far healed that they ceased to give us pain.

We often indulged in a chat with Master Joshua ; but neither of us ever broached the subject of omens, and I observed with no slight amusement that he claimed to have known from the moment we weighed anchor in Salem Harbour that our cruise would be most prosperous.

And it was prosperous ; we had taken five rich prizes in a few over one hundred days, which was more than the majority of privateersmen could say.

Every man Jack of us would have dollars in plenty once the captured vessels were sold, and, what was far better, could say with good truth that we had done even more than our share in inflicting injury upon the enemy.

We talked all these things over while the *America* was driven swiftly by favouring winds toward the Massachusetts coast, never dreaming but that we had come to an end of taking prizes until after going ashore at Salem.

Therefore it was we were almost astonished when, the voyage being more than half completed, the lookouts announced that a sail was in sight, and the information was given in a tone which told plainly the belief of the men that another Britisher was within our grasp.

It was on the sixteenth day of December, when we

were near the Western Islands, that this sail came in view from the southeast.

We in the cabin were making a long story of breakfast as a means of passing the time, when the lookout hailed, and he who has ever served on a privateer knows full well the excitement which was immediately after apparent on our decks.

I might fill page after page with an account of what was said or done from eight o'clock on that morning until nearly noon, when we had the Britisher close under our guns, for we could sail nearly two miles to her one; but so much has already been set down here concerning a chase that I shall say, without further preamble, it was quickly at an end once we came within range.

It was the brig *Euphemia*, of Glasgow, bound for Gibraltar from La Guayra, with four hundred thousand pounds of coffee on board, which we had overhauled, and, although the Britisher carried ten guns and was manned by thirty-five men, she submitted to capture as peacefully as if she had been a child.

We had only to fire a shot across her bows after she was beneath our guns, and the deed was done.

That valuable cargo and staunch vessel was ours without further parley, and would serve to swell the amount of prize-money until our men's heads swam with thinking of the good hard dollars which would be theirs once we made Salem again.

This last capture rejoiced me more than had any of the others; not particularly on account of the rich cargo, but

because she had fallen into our hands so easily, and when we believed we had done, for the time being, with capturing Britishers.

The king, who claimed the right to overhaul our vessels in order to impress Yankees under the subterfuge that they had once been Englishmen, would soon learn how much of blood and treasure it was necessary to spend in the effort to make good the claim, if indeed he ever could.

Well, we made a prize of the *Euphemia*; displaced Captain John Gray, who commanded her when she left La Guayra, by our boatswain's mate, Archibald S. Dennis, and threw on board eleven men to take the places of the twenty-one sailors and two officers we made prisoners.

The remainder of the crew promised to obey faithfully the new master, and were allowed to remain aboard the craft they had counted on taking into a British port.

Four hundred thousand pounds of coffee is not to be picked up on the ocean every day, and it can well be fancied that our crew, what was left of them, made exceeding merry over the capture; but any one of them might have been reduced to a state of shame had the cook but whispered in his ear the single word "ghost."

After we were on our course once more, in company with the prize, which we did not count on losing sight of, all hands came to understand why Captain Ropes, who had the name of being most greedy when Britishers were to be captured, was so willing to steer for the home port before we had been at sea four months.

The truth leaked out when we were put on an allowance

of three and one-half pints of water per day for each man, including the officers, and before we sighted Baker's Island once more every man Jack of us knew what it was to be thirsty.

The prisoners, despite all they would have done, were given the same amount of water as Captain Ropes himself had, and this fact was some consolation to me as I thought of what such a throng must suffer in the narrow confines of the brig.

Neither Simon Ropes nor I felt hardly toward them because of the injuries they had inflicted upon us.

In fact, it seemed only natural they should attempt to capture the ship, when what seemed a favourable opportunity presented itself, and I have no doubt but that we two lads, barring the possibility of our being too cowardly, would have made a similar effort under like circumstances.

We longed for water as a miser longs for gold, prisoners and Americans alike, before we reached port, and never again will I say that money can buy all which is needed in this world.

We sailed proudly up past Baker's Island, one hundred and twenty-two days after having passed it outward bound, and in that time we had captured six prizes that were afterward valued at one hundred and fifty-eight thousand dollars.

Show me a privateer afloat during the war just ended, which made more valuable captures, or was more successful in getting her prizes into port !

The *James and Charlotte* was carried by Mr. Tibbetts safely into Salem Harbour. The *Benjamin* put into Nan-

tucket, after having been chased for fifty-two hours by a British sloop-of-war, and, later, was sold at auction in Boston. Mr. Proctor ran the *Ralph Nickerson* into Marblehead, where her cargo of lumber found a ready sale, and Mr. Valpey successfully piloted the *Hope* into Boston Bay. The *Dart* arrived at Salem without mishap, and her merchandise is remembered to this day by the people of the eastern coast, while the *Euphemia* was chased, but succeeded in gaining the harbour of Portland, Maine, three days after we arrived at the home port.

We had not lost a single prize, which was another matter to give us more than our share of pride, and from the hour our anchor was dropped on the seventh day of January, in the year 1813, the fame of the *America* spread from Maine to South Carolina.

Captain Ropes took good care that the people of Salem should know what Simon and I had done when the prisoners attempted to capture the ship, and as we went ashore it was with difficulty we could make our way to the head of the dock, because of the throngs which were bent on showing their appreciation of our services.

I should have had sufficient courage to explain that on my part it was all an accident ; that if there had been any idea in my mind of the danger which threatened, I might not have remained in the hold of the ship to check the rush ; but even though I had screamed at the full strength of my lungs none would have heard, so great was the uproar, or, hearing, would have taken heed after Simon's father had given his account of the affair.

As a matter of fact, I hardly realised that I was receiving praise which had not been earned; the thought of being clasped in my mother's arms once more, knowing she was convinced I had done my full duty, was so great that all else passed unheeded, and until her dear arms folded me closely to her breast I did not fully understand what part I was playing in this reception given by the good people of Salem.

I came to appreciate it fully, however, at a later day, and to be exceeding proud of its being said on every street corner concerning Simon Ropes and myself, that we had shown ourselves to be the equal of any who sailed from Salem on board the armed ship *America*.

THE END.

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